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The Irish Captain: A TALE OF FONTENOY.

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AUTHOR OF "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE HUNT.

"TA-RA-LA-LA-LAH!" rung the deep, mellow notes of the great French hunting-horns, through the arches of the Forest of Fontainebleau, and the music of the clamoring pack, as they ran to and fro, baying in different tones, announced that the hounds were "at fault," the quarry having temporarily escaped them.

Presently there was a loud burst of cries, the horns sounded a gay burst of triumph, and away went the hounds on the recovered scent.

The morning sun shone down through the early mists that hung over the forest, where the great trees, undisturbed for many hundred years, had attained enormous size. Here and there little hills, whose craggy and broken sides offered a charming

miniature of larger mountains, relieved the monotony of the woods, and gave support to banks of beautiful orchids, that simulated with curious fidelity bees just alighted on the flower-cups.* Violets and anemones perfumed the air of the valleys, and the sharp clatter of the squirrels was heard on the trees, as the saucy little creatures scampered up and down, whisking their tails as if to ask one another what all this noise was about; for the baying of the hounds echoed for miles.

There is something peculiarly inspiring and delightful in the sound of a pack in full cry, that communicates a vague longing to the coolest listener, and causes even delicate ladies to be carried away in the rush of the chase. When to the sounds of a great hunt are added its sights, the eager pack, the horses, with their eyes aflame, striving in noble emulation, the gay colors of the riders, and the echoes of the mellow hunting-horns, it is no wonder that the enchantment is overpowering, and that persons once addicted to the chase soon discover a perfect passion therefor.

Such was the case with a young man, who was wandering pensively through the aisles of the forest, on foot, and had been so wandering since sunrise.

He was a handsome young fellow, tall and strong,

*The bee orchis is very common in the forest of Fontainebleau. It exactly resembles a bee alighted on a flower.

with the mien of a gentleman, though his dress was that of a private soldier, off duty. Something in his pale intellectual face, lighted up by dreamy dark eyes, and distinguished from that of civilians by a black mustache, announced that he was no ordinary man. To a military observer, there were some points about the youth that indicated his position to be somewhat above that of a common soldier.

To explain these signs is to say that the young man was what was then called a "gentleman volunteer."

The position was then a common one for youths of good family, without the money and influence to secure commissions at once. The uniform of the volunteer in question was that of Lord Clare's regiment of horse in the renowned Irish Brigade, and his name was Gerald Desmond.

Young Desmond was wandering dreamily through the forest, his eyes roaming in a sort of sensuous ecstasy over the beautiful scene around him, and his face indicating a state of perfect happiness, when the distant cry of the hounds first broke on his ear. Faint, and mellowed by the hazy atmosphere of early morning, the sound blended in perfect harmony with the mild monotone of the breeze among the branches. At first the wanderer hardly seemed to notice it, so absorbed was he in vague dreams of beauty. Then, as it grew louder, and plainly approached him, he started from his reverie and listened, his eye kindling with pleasure, for, as we have



"MONSIEUR, MONSIEUR, FOR MY SAKE SPARE HIM! HE IS MY BROTHER!"

said, the contagion is hard to resist, and this youth was a keen huntsman.

He turned and peered anxiously in the direction of the sound, and a moment later clapped his hands with excitement as he involuntarily uttered the merry cry:

"A la haute! TALLY-HO!"

There, before his eyes, at a hundred paces distance, a noble stag bounded past, horns laid back on the shoulders, nose pointed forward, as the hunted creature darted under the shade of an avenue of grand old oaks, and sped away through the forest.

Then the loud baying of the hounds sounded nearer. The stag was just out of sight when they came into view in full cry, and swept down the same avenue with unerring scent, led by an old black-and-tan hound, whose deep, bell-like voice rung out in triumph as he went.

Riveted to the spot in admiration, quivering with contagious excitement, Gerald Desmond stood watching, when out of the forest swept a brave train of riders, following a single man, small and mean in figure, bumping up and down in his demipique saddle in a manner that showed him a poor rider, but—wearing the broad blue ribbon over his shoulder that announced him to be of royal blood.

"The king himself, by Jove!" muttered Desmond, with a start, as he watched the glittering train sweep by. At the word he stepped behind a tree, as if fearing to be seen, and watched the hunt from a safe covert. He could see several ladies in the train, and strangest of all, a long, lumbering coach of curious make came on the heels of the riders, drawn at full speed by a half-dozen gray horses. This strange vehicle boasted a lofty, gilded box in front, with a gorgeous hammer-cloth, embroidered with the arms of France. The body was some twenty feet in length, and cylindrical in shape, with a double foot-board. On it sat five or six chasseurs, as if in the saddle, a foot on each side, their guns before them. Over the hind wheels was a hood and seats like an ordinary wagon, and within the latter vehicle was a lady.

Gerald recognized in a moment the celebrated hunting-chariot of the king, but he could not help laughing at the awkward figure out by the chasseurs, astraddle on the body, as the chariot bumped over the uneven ground.

A moment later the hunters had swept by, and Desmond was alone.

"Well," said the youth, with a deep breath of relief, "tis just as well I was not seen, or it might be a week's guard-room for me."

He stood for a few moments listening to the sounds of the chase.

"They are getting round toward Melun," he muttered. "I must make the best of my way back to the palace. If they see me I may get into a scrape for being out of bounds."

And he turned his face in the direction of the palace, where his regiment was then on guard. It was as he had said. Under the forest laws of France, and still more under the ceremonial that governed the troops, the young volunteer was liable to severe punishment, he having wandered out of bounds, into the royal preserves, where no one was allowed save by the king's invitation.

It was no wonder that Gerald turned to retrace his steps to get out of the further track of the hunt.

He had hardly gone twenty feet toward the palace, when he heard a sharp, cracked voice calling:

"Holla! monsieur, who are you?"

CHAPTER II.

A BRAVE ACT.

THE young soldier stopped at the sound of that voice, and looked around.

Some one was approaching him at a gentle trot, mounted on a fat little cob, and very unlike the gay riders who had just passed by. Gerald contemplated him, in spite of his apprehension at having been discovered, with no little amusement.

The new-comer was wrapped from head to foot in a long brown *roquelaure*, a sort of sack-coat reaching to the heels, and only worn by old people. Although he was on horseback, he seemed to be unprovided with boots, then deemed indispensable, and his buckled shoes and silk stockings were fitted for a drawing-room. From under his broad, three-cornered hat, and between the edges of the upturned collar of the *roquelaure*, peeped out a thin, pale face, with long nose and very sharp eyes, while an expression of sneering sarcasm sat on the large, thin-lipped mouth. This personage was crouched down in his saddle, as if shivering with cold, though the air was quite mild, and addressed the young soldier in the same shrill, cracked voice:

"Well, monsieur; you do not answer. Who are you?"

Gerald looked up at the other somewhat haughtily.

"Does not my uniform tell you? For my name, it is nothing to you."

The keen-looking old gentleman—his voice told his age—allowed a smile to cross his wasted countenance, and the effect was magical. The sneering look disappeared, and the withered, parchment-like face seemed to be illuminated with a glory of kindness.

"My young friend," he said, "I did not mean to be rude, but I took you for one of his majesty's foresters, and as such, wished to ask you which way the hunt had gone."

Gerald's face cleared, and he removed his hat. "Pardon, monsieur," he said, respectfully. "The hunt has passed toward Melun, but it is sure to make a circuit. The stag always runs in a circle, and comes back to his old haunts at evening. Listen to the hounds, and you'll find they're heading to the right now."

The stranger uttered an impatient exclamation. "Saceristie! That I was a fool to come out! When I might be enjoying a quiet day with my books, here I am following a will-of-the-wisp, to gain the favor of Louis the Well Beloved. Bah! I will go home. Who am I at my age, to come out on cold mornings and trust myself on a wild horse?"

Desmond could hardly help laughing at the other's complaints.

"Why, monsieur," he said, smilingly, "you can not complain of the animal you ride. It seems quiet enough."

"But I acknowledge it, my friend. Have I not told the stableman to give me the gentlest creature in the stalls? A pretty figure I should cut on a

prancer. But, is there no short cut by which I can get to see the hunt?"

"Certainly," said the soldier, politely. "If you stay here you will soon find them crossing the paths to Fontainebleau. If the Grand Huntsman is not abroad, you will have no trouble."

The stranger eyed the youth keenly.

"What do you mean by the Grand Huntsman?" he asked.

Gerald crossed himself piously, and his companion's face instantly became mocking and sarcastic, as the soldier said:

"The Grand Huntsman is a demon that haunts these woods, and God deliver us if we hear his hounds, monsieur. One of us will die within the year."

The stranger burst into a shrill, cackling laugh.

"Eh, *mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, "who would have thought it? The eighteenth century has not lost all its superstitions yet. Come, *mon ami*, let us go hunt up this Grand Huntsman, and show him that demons vanish in the light of reason."

Gerald drew back.

"I am sorry, monsieur," he answered, "that I can not go with you, but I have strayed out of bounds, in my love of nature, and if I am found by those of the court, I may suffer punishment. I must return to my quarters."

The stranger shook his head musingly, as he murmured:

"And these men they call heroes, kept in bounds like truant school-boys, and proud of their degradation, for they hold their heads up, these same soldiers."

Then he turned to Gerald with the same rare and beautiful smile that he had before shown, and addressed him kindly:

"My young friend, if you will stay with me and guide me into the path of this hunt, so that I may see it without endangering my old bones, I can engage to hold you harmless for the act."

Gerald stared at the enigmatical old man, who laughed.

"Ah! thou believest not that an old fellow like me can do such things; but know, young man, that brains are a commodity of which the world is beginning to appreciate the value at last. I tell thee that I can make the king forgive thee, if I wish."

Gerald bowed respectfully, saying:

"Your excellency must then be a minister of state or some very great personage. I trust you would not deceive me, monsieur."

Again the stranger smiled.

"Whatever men say of me, they never call me a deceiver. I proclaim the truth, and they call me infidel, but my worst enemies, the priests, admit that I tell the truth as I believe it, if they curse me for it. Let your mind be at rest about me. I will see you harmless. Now guide me toward the hunt."

Gerald made no more objections. There was something about his singular companion that impressed him with a sense of superiority, and his brusque manner did not tend to remove the impression. Without a word, the young soldier started forward on the track.

The sounds of the chase were still faintly audible in the still woods, and, as Gerald had predicted, they were evidently sweeping in a vast circle toward a point where he knew that many of the hunts had terminated in times past. It was in a lonely glade, in the center of which towered a single gigantic oak, twenty feet across at the butt, and known throughout the forest as "The Pharamond," from a tradition that it was planted by the first of the French kings, a likely conceit, in view of its great age.

It was beneath the shade of the Pharamond oak, likewise, that "Robin des Bois," or the Grand Huntsman, was said to hold his nightly meetings, with spectral hounds, before taking the trail of invisible deer by moonlight.

It was quite possible that the young soldier might have hesitated to approach this mystic spot at nightfall, for Gerald Desmond, as brave as a lion, was yet superstitious as all of his race and creed. In the morning light with a companion who laughed all superstition to scorn, he was ashamed to hesitate.

Accordingly he led the way toward the Pharamond oak.

As they approached the place, they could hear the hounds coming toward them, though in a circuitous direction, and they plunged deeper and deeper into the forest, taking advantage of the valleys to ease the route. All the way Gerald's eccentric companion kept up an animated conversation, succeeding, with great skill, in drawing the young soldier to talk of himself, his hopes, and wishes, in all of which the old gentleman seemed to take a lively interest.

At last they entered a grove of trees of remarkable height, and then suddenly emerged in an open green glade of the forest, surrounded with tall, graceful birch trees, in the midst of which towered a single oak tree of gigantic size, whose top waved in the breeze at a hundred and fifty feet from the ground. It was the renowned Pharamond oak, standing in solitary grandeur in its forest temple.

Gerald's companion uttered an expression of great admiration, as he gazed up at the forest giant, but he was prevented from speaking. The next minute into the solitary glade dashed the hunted stag, and rushing up to the old oak, turned and stood at bay, with his back to the grand old tree.

Right opposite to the two wanderers was an open avenue, through the birch grove, overarched with bright foliage, and within that picturesque frame the royal pack came dashing forward, a brilliant mass of color, in the midst of which a splendid black horse, evidently ungovernable, bore the figure of one of the ladies that Gerald had noticed in the hunt.

She was alone, the rest of the hunters having been distanced at the severe pace.

On came the hounds and the runaway horse, and then, with a wild clamor of baying voices, the pack rushed at the stag.

But the king of the woods was not dismayed. His branching horns waved in the air, and came down with a fearful blow on the foremost dogs, transfixing two of them. With a deep bellow of anger the stag shook off his assailants, and plunged among the pack, striking with his sharp fore-feet, and goring the dogs, till the boldest ran howling back, and bay-

ed in a circle. It was all done in a few moments, and then the wild runaway horse came dashing up, excited by the chase, and was charged by the angry stag.

Gerald and his companion had been watching the scene spellbound, but now the young soldier flashed out his rapier, and ran shouting across the glade.

He was too late!

Before he arrived, the furious stag had gored and overthrown the heedless young horse, and stood with his fore-feet on the animal, his eyes sparkling with fury, while his horns menaced death to the fallen lady.

Gerald could see her instinctively throw up her arms in vain defense, and then the antlers of the stag were descending, when the volunteer, with a last superhuman effort, reached the stag, wreathed his left hand in the shaggy hair on the animal's breast, and drove his rapier through and through the heart, throwing the carcass off the horse by the main strength of his rush.

In an instant the hounds were clamoring round the carcass, and the lady was safe.

Gerald turned, and found her lying partly under the dying horse, which was struggling to rise.

With the same quick courage and decision that had marked all his conduct, the young soldier snatched her away from the new danger, and carried her back several paces, when he discovered, by the lifeless weight that hung in his arms, that the lady had fainted.

Then, for the first time, he looked closely at her, and discovered that she was young and beautiful, with fair curling hair, a sweet face, full of intellect even in the swoon, with a beautifully-rounded figure, which was attired in a riding-dress of the richest materials.

Involuntarily Gerald's heart swelled with a new and strange feeling. He had saved the life of a beautiful lady, evidently of the highest rank, and she lay in his arms, helpless and unresisting.

How long he might have stood thus, and what vague dreams he might have dreamt, is uncertain, but he was awakened by the sharp voice of his eccentric companion.

"Bravely done, by my faith, young Irelander! By the blue Heaven! I thought she was doomed. Whom hast thou there?"

As he spoke, he pressed his cob forward to get a nearer view of the lady's face, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

It was drowned in the shouts of the rest of the hunters, who just then dashed into the glade, with a tremendous blowing of horns, and came galloping up to surround the pack.

In the confusion that followed, Gerald was hardly conscious of his actions. He remained with the inanimate lady in his arms, forgetful of all else, while the buzz of questions and answers above his head sounded bewildering.

He could distinguish the sharp tones of his new acquaintance among these, but presently there was a silence, in the midst of which a smooth, somewhat querulous voice demanded:

"Who is he? What does he here?"

"I asked him to guide me hither, your majesty," answered Gerald's friend, "and but for his courage and presence of mind, madame would now be out of your majesty's reach, in the place where kings are never wished, except by their successors."

Gerald looked up for the first time, and found himself the center of a group of courtiers on horseback, all of whom were regarding him with glances of covert dislike. His new friend stood on foot by the side of the king's horse, and Louis the Well Beloved was regarding the young volunteer with a look of fretful ill-temper.

At that moment the young lady stirred in his arms, uttered a deep sigh, and came out of her swoon.

When she opened her large blue eyes, they met the dark orbs of young Desmond fixed on her own, and she smiled faintly, murmuring softly:

"C'est toi, *mon ami*, grace a Dieu!"

"It is thou, my friend, thank God!"

Gerald flushed scarlet at the address. He did not dare to look up, but he heard a faint titter among the courtiers, and then his eccentric friend brusquely advanced and relieved him of his lovely burden, saying, in a low, guarded voice:

"Retire at once, young man. You are in danger."

Gerald's eyes met his doubtfully, but there was something so warning in the look of his late companion that he involuntarily obeyed. The horsemen made way for his departure, with sneers on their smooth faces, and the young soldier plucked out his rapier from the slain deer, and left the glade, in a state of bewildered amazement.

CHAPTER III.

THE SLAP IN THE FACE.

IN the *cafes* of the Palais Royal in Paris were collected crowds of officers and of the gentlemen volunteers of various regiments composing the garrison, for there were wars and rumors of wars with England and Austria, and Marshal Saxe had been appointed commander-in-chief of the frontiers.

In one of these *cafes*, the largest on the square, the green uniforms of the Irish Brigade were prominent, for it was their favorite restaurant. At one of the largest tables sat three gentlemen volunteers, all wearing the cuirass of Clare's regiment of horse, with broad-skirted coats, heavy boots, and long straight swords.

One of these was a man of great stature, with a fiery red mustache, curling up to his eyes, while the glow of his hair seemed ready to burn through the powder with which it was dressed. His face was by no means handsome, being deeply pitted with the small-pox, but its owner had an air of satisfied vanity, that proclaimed his own opinion of his good looks.

The second was a short young man, with broad shoulders, intensely black hair and thin mustache, with black eyes. He was taciturn and somewhat sullen in manner, but had a low, sweet voice of remarkable melody.

Third came Gerald Desmond, the handsomest of the party.

The three seemed to be old and intimate friends from their manner toward each other, and the red giant was just finishing a speech to Gerald in the English tongue, with a strong brogue.

"Ye did foinely, me boy, foinely, and it's not all the courtiers of the French king that'll make Jack Carroll deny that same. What matter if the blackguards did trate you rudely, isn't it the way an Irishman must expect to be trated by all the world, till we come to our own again? Ah, Gerald, it won't be forever we'll be loungin' 'round Paris, 'ating our hearts out with impatience. We'll meet the red-coats soon now, and then we'll see if ould Louis won't think better of his Irish Brigade."

Gerald shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the use of boasting, Jack?" he said, quietly. "We Irish always have been fools enough to throw away our blood in other people's quarrels, and always shall. I suppose I was just such a fool to save the lady's life. I own I expected a civil word, instead of sour looks, but it's no more than an Irishman always gets. What do you say, Billy?"

The dark young man spoke, in his low voice.

"I think that you must have saved some great court lady, perhaps one of the princesses, and the courtiers are jealous. That's all."

Jack Carroll burst into a roar of laughter, as he clapped the other on the shoulder.

"Billy Cavanagh, ye're a jewel, so ye are, to foind out the whole mystery. Sure it's as plain as the nose on yer face, Desmond. What would ye be wantin' to go stickin' your Irish mug in among them Frinch lords, and they all hangin' on the king's skirts for a male of victuals. What for should they thank ye?"

Desmond laughed. He was used to his friend's rough jesting.

"I suppose you're right, Jack," he said; and there the subject ended; for at that minute a party advanced and occupied the next table to that at which the Irish volunteers were sitting.

The new-comers were also private soldiers, but of a very different corps, one in which the privates were all of noble blood, and able to rank as officers in other corps. They belonged to the famous regiment organized in the days of Louis XIII. and known as the "Black Musketeers," whose duties were round the king's person, and whose commander took precedence of the marshals of France themselves.

There were three of these Black Musketeers at the table, all handsome, conceited young fellows, of the best families, dressed in the magnificent uniform of their corps, of white and crimson. The title "Black" was given to them from the color of their horses, there being other companies known as the "Gray" and the "Red" from the same circumstance.

From their very first entrance there had been a hush in the restaurant, for it was seldom that a Musketeer was seen there. Each regiment had its favorite haunts, and this *café* was considered sacred to the Irish, Scotch and other foreign troops, who had entered the king's service from that of the exiled Stuarts of England.

As the Musketeers, and indeed all the Household Troops, were notorious duelists, it was at once divined that the three gentlemen in question had a quarrel with some one in the room, and when they selected their table, every one judged that they must be near their antagonists, whoever they were.

Such were the notions of honor prevalent at the time, that no one in the room took any notice of the strangers, beyond an occasional glance that way over the rim of a glass, while drinking.

The Musketeers rapped on the floor with their scabbards, and called for wine, which was speedily furnished them. The Irish cuirassiers at the next table had become silent or conversed in low tones in their own tongue, which was incomprehensible to the Frenchmen, as they knew.

Presently one of the Musketeers filled his glass, and said:

"Messieurs, I am about to propose a toast."

"Let us have it, St. Foix," said a fair-haired youth, stretching his frame, lazily. "Only give us one we can all drink."

St. Foix was a handsome, insolent young man, with dark face and aquiline features. He looked around with a peculiar smile at the next table and said:

"I will give you one, Granville, that all must drink, or I'll know the reason why. Fill your glasses."

Then he stepped up close to Desmond, and addressed him with great politeness, but with a mocking smile:

"Monsieur, you will not refuse to drink our toast, I am sure?"

"When I know what it is, I may answer," replied Gerald, quietly.

"You have reason, sir. My toast is, 'France for Frenchmen!' Refuse it if you dare."

In a moment Gerald was on his feet. From the first he had suspected that an insult was intended to him, and he felt ready to meet it. The toast was unexceptionable in words, but its spirit was a reflection on the foreigners. Gerald raised his glass, and spoke in a loud, clear tone, amid a general hush, for every one was now watching them keenly.

"Comrades, I hope we shall all drink that toast. I will for one, and give it in full: 'France for Frenchmen, Ireland for the Irish, and God for us all!'"

In a moment a rousing cheer went up from every table, and every glass was emptied. Gerald smiled at his antagonist, who was taken quite aback, and sat down.

St. Foix remained standing, with his untasted glass in his hand, surveying Desmond with a sneer. As soon as the room was silent, he spoke very clearly and distinctly:

"Sir, I agree with your sentiments. Ireland is the best place for you, for example. To your safe arrival there, and may you never come back."

And he tossed off his glass, then flitted some of the dregs on Desmond, a drop touching the latter's face. This time there was no mistake. The insult was undeniable. The Musketeer sat down at his own table with a triumphant smile, and a dead silence supervened. Every one was watching to see how Gerald would take it. Jack Carroll's hard, pock-marked face was a study. He had not uttered a word during the little passage of compliments, but sat with both hands on the pommel of his sword, his chin on the former, looking from one to the other, and twisting his features into the most extraordinary grimaces. Cavanagh did not seem to notice any thing, and he played with his glass.

Gerald Desmond remained a moment in his place. His heart gave a sudden leap at the insolent manner of the other, and his voice trembled as he rose and tried to speak.

"Monsieur," he said, addressing himself to St. Foix, "you are too careless with your wine—do you hear?"

St. Foix did not answer. He merely leaned over to fill his glass at his own table, with a sarcastic smile.

Then Gerald made a single step to the other's side, and for the first time exhibited excitement. Down came his strong right hand on the other's shoulder with a clench of iron!

"Monsieur," he thundered, "*sortons!!!*"

At the same moment he brought his left hand in a back-handed blow full in the insolent face of his enemy.

That done he stepped back, picked up his hat and cloak, and stalked toward the door.

The action was so prompt and vigorous that the Musketeer, who had come prepared for a duel, was for a moment overcome. The blood poured from his nose, and he was compelled to stanch it with his handkerchief, before he could rise to follow.

As for the rest of the room, it was all in a tumult instantly. The companions of Foix leaped up, and half drew their rapiers, but not so quickly but that Carroll and Cavanagh were quickest. The red giant, with a single stride, reached Granville, whom he seized with his powerful grasp, shouting:

"Not a step, monsieur, or by the toe-nails of St. Patrick, I'll break every bone in your body! Your friend deserved it!"

Cavanagh was equally prompt to seize the other by the arms, saying, sternly:

"Fair play, monsieur. You shall have all the fighting you want, but in the right way."

Then Scotch, Irish, and French officers and volunteers, crowded round, and a hubbub of voices was heard. Desmond was stopped on his way to the door, and an animated discussion ensued, which ended in a few minutes by the appointment of a meeting in the *Pre aux Clercs*, or Clerks' Meadow, behind Notre Dame, the dueling ground of Paris.

St. Foix, who had succeeded in stanching the blood from his nose, was much less insolent in his demeanor now, but his face, pale as death, was set in an expression of fierce resolve. He made no objection to the meeting; indeed, behaved with great courtesy to the Irish gentlemen round him. The fact was that every one respected his daring in coming almost alone into the midst of his enemy's stronghold, and the chivalrous generosity of the highborn Irish nobles was punctilious in its observance of courtesy to him, in spite of his unprovoked insult to Desmond.

The latter was still in a state of bewilderment as to the cause of attack. The Musketeer had singled him out so pointedly that it was evident that he knew him, and yet Gerald could assign no cause for the other's behavior.

He was too true an Irishman, however, to refuse to fight on that account. Like all his race, he would fight for fun, if required. In a quarter of an hour after the fracas, he was on his way to the Clerks' Meadow, with his two friends, while the three Musketeers sauntered carelessly after in the same direction.

In half an hour two large parties were on the grounds, the news having spread with lightning speed and secrecy, the only parties left in the dark being the police.

Just as the clock of Notre Dame struck six, and the sun was setting, Gerald and his two friends stood opposite to the three Musketeers, sword in hand.

CHAPTER IV. THE TRIPLE DUEL.

ACCORDING to the custom of the age, the principals did not fight alone. Each had his seconds, who engaged alongside, and any one dispatching his antagonist had a right to help his friends afterward.

There was but little time wasted in ceremony. Both parties were armed alike, both wore cuirasses, and carried long three-cornered rapiers. Merely removing their hats to bow formally to each other, they instantly replaced them, and crossed swords with a clash. The twilight at that season of the year afforded ample light for an hour to come, and the thrusts and parries were delivered with great vigor and precision for several moments.

Gerald Desmond, a good swordsman at any time, found that in St. Foix he had met a dangerous antagonist. The Frenchman's rapier played around his own blade in small glittering circles, with wonderful rapidity, and each thrust gained on his own parry by a fraction of a second, so that the point came closer and closer momentarily.

As both wore cuirasses, it was useless to thrust at the body, and the combatants confined themselves to the limbs. At last Gerald felt a sharp prick in his shoulder. St. Foix's point had touched. Then the Irishman executed a trick that took the other by surprise. With a sudden whirl, he brought his left foot foremost, and the rapier, plowing up his shoulder, pierced the sleeve of his coat, and ran out on the other side. Pressing forward, so as to engage it still more, Desmond seized the Musketeer with his left hand, drew back his sword, and stabbed the other full in the right thigh, spitting him through and through.

Then he sprung back, and St. Foix fell to the ground with a cry of unconcealable pain, while the Irish cuirassier turned to see how the fight went with his companions. His shoulder smarted and pained worse than if the wound had been deeper, but he knew that he was not dangerously hurt.

He beheld Jack Carroll, evidently bearing down his slight adversary, Granville. The gigantic volunteer was thrusting at the other, and yelling with true Irish delight, while his fiery mustache bristled over his grated teeth. The Musketeer was being driven back with increasing rapidity, while Carroll complimented him with sarcastic epithets at every fresh thrust, too quick and strong to be denied. The fight was plainly by no means equal.

Presently Granville, excited by the taunts of the other, made a desperate rally, executed the same trick that Gerald had just performed, and by taking a wounded shoulder and torn coat, succeeded in stabbing the Irish giant. His thrust caught Carroll

* *Sortons*—let us go out. The ultimate challenge to instant duel, which no Frenchman, in those dueling days, could refuse without intolerable disgrace.

full on the face, for it was wildly given, and ran him through the cheek, breaking a tooth in the passage.

With a roar of rage, the cuirassier staggered back a moment, and then, forgetting his science in his fury, he rushed at the Frenchman, discharging a shower of blows from a weapon without an edge, as if it had been a shillelah.

Under this novel assault to him—Granville retreated in dismay. His hat was knocked off and his head bruised in a few blows, and Carroll, grasping him by main force, disdainful of his sword, would have strangled him a moment later.

He was interrupted by a fresh antagonist.

Cavanagh had been the most unlucky of the Irish party. A small man at best, he was but a young swordsman, and his antagonist was a master of the weapon. Defending himself as well as he could, he was forced to retreat as fast as Carroll's opponent. Just as Granville struck at Carroll's face, Cavanagh's foot slipped, and his antagonist spitted him through the sword arm with a grim laugh of triumph.

Then, without wasting a moment, the Musketeer rushed to the help of Granville, and reached the scene in time to give the Irish giant a prod in the rear that caused him to fling Granville down with a howl, while he turned like a lion on his treacherous foe.

But this was the moment for Desmond to act, and he did act, with a promptitude that restored the contest immediately.

Seeing that the Frenchman was unwounded, and evidently a superior swordsman, he flew to Carroll's help, just as the Irish giant received a third wound in the sword arm.

Before the Frenchman could interpose his rapier, Gerald's point caught him in the arm-hole of the cuirass, and the Irishman buried his sword in the body of the Musketeer.

The duel was over, and the Irish party had triumphed, for Granville surrendered to his two foes.

CHAPTER V.

TO HIS LADY'S BOWER.

LATE that evening, two cavaliers, wrapped in large cloaks, were passing through the dimly-lighted and narrow streets of the Faubourg St. Honore, in Paris, when a young lad in the dress of a page, hastily accosted the shorter of the two, in a low voice, saying:

"Monsieur, may I speak with you a moment?"

"With me? and why with me?" demanded Gerald Desmond, for it was he, in some surprise.

"You are the cavalier that was at the hunt in the forest," said the boy, in a positive tone; "for I saw you there."

Jack Carroll gave a short laugh, checked by a grunt, for his face was tied up, and pained severely.

"Go along with ye, Desmond," he mumbled. "I'll bail it's the purty cr'ature that ye're dr'amin' about, sint for ye. Ye're in luck, at last."

Gerald disengaged his arm from that of his companion with a strange tremor of excitement. The words of the boy had suggested the same train of thought to himself.

"Yes, I am that cavalier," he said, eagerly. "What would you?"

"Will monsieur come with me, and submit to be blindfolded?" asked the boy, in a whisper.

The volunteer drew back.

"Blindfolded—for what reason?"

"I can not tell, monsieur," said the boy, confidentially, "but the lady gave me strict orders."

"The lady! What lady?" asked Gerald, eagerly.

"The lady whom monsieur saved," whispered the boy. "You must not say another word, but come, or stay. Which is it?"

It is needless to speculate on Gerald's answer. Young, ardent, and full of Irish impetuosity, he hesitated no longer. The beautiful lady had sent for him, and it was enough.

"Jack," he said, hurriedly, to his companion, "you'll excuse me for leaving you, will you not?"

"And I will that," said Carroll, heartily. "Good luck with ye!"

"Now then, boy," said Gerald to the young messenger, "lead on."

"Will monsieur, then, put on this bandage?" said the boy, producing a black bandage and offering it to the young soldier. "I must trust to monsieur's honor to blind himself completely."

Gerald tied on the bandage without a word, and the appeal to his honor compelled him to do it more effectually than he might have otherwise done.

Carroll, with a short "good-night," turned away, whistling an old Jacobite air, and took the road to the barracks of his regiment, while the boy, keeping hold of Gerald's hand, turned a corner and down a side street, whence they proceeded to thread a maze of narrow lanes and alleys, Desmond following his guide with quiet trust.

His Irish comrade had no sooner lost sight of them than he halted, listening to their footsteps. Then, with a muttered word, he stooped down and unbuckled the jingling spurs he wore, which betrayed his coming a long way ahead, put them in his pocket, threw his cloak over his left arm, so as to act as a shield, and to free his motions from incumbrance; and finally turned and deliberately began to dog his comrade and his young guide. The clang of Gerald's spurs was distinctly audible a street ahead, and Carroll, by keeping in the muddy gutter, was able to follow without being heard or seen.

"By the big bell of Athlone!" muttered the giant, as he stole along, "it's mighty foinie intirely to be trustin' the ladies; but Jack Carroll isn't the boy to let his comrade run into danger blindfolded. Maybe it's all right, and maybe again it isn't. It's mighty quare them Musketeers should have kicked up that shindy this afternoon with a man they never saw before. Ye may give yer honor, Gerald, but I haven't given mine not to follow ye, and by the cross of St. Patrick! I'll know where they take ye."

Thus muttering to himself, the cuirassier stole along, with a caution and stillness of which no one would have deemed his huge frame capable. He was wounded in three places, it is true, but none of them seriously affected his powers, the sword-arm wound being a mere scratch; and Carroll, when cool, was a splendid swordsman, on account of his length of reach and great strength of wrist. In a few moments he had turned the same corner round which Gerald and his conductor had gone.

They were no longer to be seen. There was but a single lamp in the street, a dim, smoky thing, hanging on a rope over the middle of the kennel, for Paris in those days was innocent of gas. He could hear the clash of Gerald's spurs and the pattering footsteps of the lad in another lane, and he stole on, with immense strides, stepping as softly as possible in the mud. When he reached the next corner he distinguished the forms of his friend and the boy, just vanishing round a third corner. Encouraged in his object, he proceeded with increased rapidity, and succeeded in keeping them in sight during a long, and apparently aimless, ramble amid the crooked streets. First they left the aristocratic Faubourg St. Honore and plunged into the squalid slums of the Faubourg St. Antoine, the Five Points of Paris. Threading street after street, in a long circuit, they finally emerged by the banks of the Seine, only to turn again, and enter the precincts of the most aristocratic quarter of all, the Faubourg St. Germain.

"Aha!" muttered Carroll, "sure we're comin' there at last. Ye're a sharp boy, but Jack Carroll's behind ye."

As the Irishman had suspected from the first, the boy began to walk slower when he got into this quarter. It was evident he was nearing his destination. Once he stopped and looked round, but Carroll was prepared for the maneuver. He had been slinking along close to the houses, and when the boy turned, he stopped and stood like a statue, his form blending with a sculptured urn in front of a gateway.

At last the page and his conductor paused in front of a large house, dark and gloomy in appearance, and where the only light came from the little window of the porter's lodge, beside the carriage archway.

Carroll shrunk close to a house, and watched them. They did not go to the lodge. The page stopped at a little alleyway beside the house, dived down it with Desmond, and vanished.

When the cuirassier arrived at the same alley, he perceived a small gateway in a high, brick garden-wall, and the door was closed, the alley empty.

"By the Hokey! but I've got ye at last, ye slippery little devil!" muttered Carroll, as he withdrew into the street to examine the outside of the house.

"Now who may all this belong to?" He scanned the outside to discover some traces of ownership, but the night was too dark to distinguish the coat-of-arms over the carriage-way, and the cuirassier was too cautious to enter at the porter's lodge to inquire.

There was only one thing to be done, if he wished to trace his friend, which was to remain where he was till the other came out, and this he resolved to do. Retiring to the opposite side of the street, Carroll took his post in the gloomy archway of a corresponding alley, wrapped himself in his cloak, and leaned against the wall, prepared for a patient watch.

Minute after minute flew by, and all was perfectly still. It was long past the time for balls and routs, for in those days earlier hours were kept, on account of the want of the lights with which we now turn night into day. The lamp in the porter's lodge was now extinguished, and the great house was as dark as a tomb.

Presently the deep boom of the clock of Notre Dame tolled slowly out on the air.

There were but three strokes.

Then clock after clock followed, all over the city, and in a few minutes all was still again.

Carroll folded his arms and waited patiently. Presently he thought that he heard the distant sound of footsteps in a neighboring street. He was not mistaken. Tramp, tramp, tramp, clash, clash—it became plain that two gentlemen, with spurs and swords, were coming.

The cuirassier arranged his cloak so as to leave his sword-hilt ready to his hand, and maintained his post. He heard the sound of deep voices, in the low grumbling tones of men, in confidential conversation, and was not surprised, when they turned up the street in which he stood and came toward him. He had felt all along that something mysterious was going to happen.

Presently the two men passed in front of him, but, contrary to what he had expected, both wore the uniforms of the carabineers of the king's household.

Both halted in front of the very house he was watching; and one of them, a slight, youthful figure, said in a low tone:

"*Parâieu*, Etioles, the fellow must be a fool after all. You wouldn't catch me trusting myself blindfold to a boy."

"These Irish will do anything," said the second, a tall cavalier, whose face was hidden from Carroll's view. "They will run into any danger after a pretty face."

"One thing, we have the dog now," said the slighter one, savagely. "By the blue heaven, Etioles, it was well thought of, to send the boy after him. It will surprise madame, and give us both a good excuse to kill him."

"I wonder has he arrived yet?" muttered the one called Etioles. "If I thought he were, now would be the time to go on."

"Best not," said the other, with a sneering laugh. "It is never fair to enter a lady's house without giving her notice. He is in by this time, for Jacques is a faithful boy. When he comes out, we can finish him."

"Then, by the powers, ye'll have to dale with Jack Carroll, too," muttered the cuirassier, as he eyed the unconscious plotters. "I was afraid of this, ye dirty thaves."

"Hist! some one comes," suddenly whispered Etioles, starting to one side. "There he comes, beyond a doubt."

Carroll looked across the street. The light of a lantern was seen moving behind the brick wall, and a key was rattling at the little door.

The two Musketeers, with drawn swords, stood waiting on either side of the alley-way.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURPRISE-PARTY.

WHEN Gerald Desmond surrendered himself to his young guide, he had no fear of the result of his adventure. Ever since his encounter in the forest, the image of the pale, beautiful face of the lady he had saved floated before his mental vision. Young and a soldier, he had yet never before been in love,

and the passion that he now entertained was correspondingly violent, strong enough to overcome scruples and fears alike.

He accompanied his little conductor in silence along their tortuous route. Once, when he did address him a question, the boy made no answer but a whispered "Hush!" and after that, Gerald spoke no more. His word pledged to retain the bandage, nothing would have induced him to remove it, and he soon lost all idea of locality in the rapid and capricious turns of his guide.

When they turned into the dark alley-way, and stopped at the garden door, he asked his conductor:

"Are we there yet?"

"Almost," said the lad in a whisper. "You must not speak now. I am going to take you up-stairs, and leave you alone in a room. When you hear a door shut, you may remove the bandage. Do you give your word?"

"I do," replied Gerald, unhesitatingly. Then he heard a key grate in the lock, and he stepped over the threshold of a door, on soft grass.

His companion locked the door behind them, and then, taking his hand, led him on, till they ascended a flight of stone steps. In a few moments later, a door softly opened, and Gerald felt the warm air of a house on his face.

"Step softly," whispered the lad. "Your spurs clatter too loud."

Gerald proceeded with due caution down a stone passage, and up some softly-carpeted stairs, when he came into another passage that seemed to be very thickly covered, for his foot sunk noiselessly into something soft, and even his spurs made the faintest of jingles.

At last his guide opened a door, and he was sensible, through the bandage, of a flood of light, in contrast with the dense darkness he had before felt.

"When you hear a door close," whispered the lad, "unbandage your eyes. Go forward as far as you can, and good fortune attend you."

A moment later there was a subdued noise, as of the shutting of a door, and Gerald Desmond took off the bandage, to find himself alone in a small ante-room, sumptuously furnished in white and gold, in the gaudy fashion of Louis XV. and his times.

It was several moments before the young soldier's eyes grew accustomed to the light, of which there was a perfect glare in the room, from a central chandelier. Then he remembered his guide's advice, and marched straight forward.

Before him was a closed door. The lock yielded to his hand, and he beheld a second room, larger than the first, furnished in pink and gold, and equally empty of human presence.

Wondering, but resolved to explore to the last, the Irish volunteer passed boldly through the second room. He saw a door ajar before him, and heard the sound of voices behind it. He stopped to listen.

Both were female voices, and one—he had heard it but once, but he remembered every tone—was the same that had once murmured, "*C'est toi, mon ami.*" He recognized every note.

It can not be denied that Gerald Desmond experienced a serious feeling of embarrassment as he advanced to this door, which separated him from the lady of his adoration. Had she been alone, it might have been different, but the presence of a companion altered the case. Who was this companion, and what were two ladies doing sitting up at three in the morning?

Revolving these questions in his mind, he stepped up to the door and threw it open, standing in the doorway. There he stood as if rooted to the spot, dumb with surprise.

He beheld before him the most charming of boudoirs, hung and furnished in pale-blue silk and silver lace. In the midst was a little round table and chairs covered with ivory, the table bearing a coffee-service of peculiarly delicate and beautiful porcelain.

At one side of the apartment was a bright wood-fire in an open chimney, and seated before it, in an easy-chair, of which the wood was ivory, the cushions blue silk, was Gerald's enigmatical old friend of the hunt, who had warned him against danger.

Relieved of his long roquelaure, this strange old gentleman appeared in a suit of pearl-colored satin, with white-silk stockings, and his shriveled yellow face looked keener than ever, under the snowy twig. He was looking at the blaze, and leisurely sipping a cup of coffee.

At the table, presiding over the coffee-service, was a young lady, very small, very pretty, with sparkling black eyes and black eyebrows, while her full red lips pouted bewitchingly over snowy teeth. She wore a magnificent evening-dress of white and amber satin, which suited her dark Italian face to a charm, and her hair was thickly powdered.

But Gerald's eyes left all the rest, to gaze on the figure of the lady he had saved.

There she was, sure enough, as lovely as ever, her fair hair thrown back from her forehead, with an imperial, coronet-like wave, crowned with diamonds. She lay back in a large couch, with whose blue and silver trimmings her dress, of blue satin and white lace, harmonized perfectly.

As she lay indolently against the cushions, near the old gentleman, her face was turned toward the door, as were none of the others, and she was the first to perceive Gerald.

The apparition of a tall dragoon, with breast-plate and sword, his black hair falling over his shoulders in the wild style of the Irish Brigade, who disdained powder, his heavy horseman's cloak trailing behind him, was enough to surprise any one.

The lady started, uttered a slight shriek, and remained staring at the door, as if terrified. The young brunette looked round in surprise, then in her turn uttered a scream of terror, and sprang to the side of the blonde lady, still screaming and hiding her eyes in the other's dress.

The old gentleman turned his head to the door, and remained staring as if spellbound a moment. Then he started up, with the alacrity of a young man, put down his cup on the table with a deliberation that showed the possession of firm nerves, and advanced on the young soldier.

"What do you here, monsieur?" he asked, sharply. "Who are you, how did you get in, what do you want?"

Gerald was for a moment dumbfounded. The surprise of every one in the room was so natural and unfeigned, that for the first time he began to realize that some trick had been played on him.

He was too bold and straightforward, however, to hesitate now.

Advancing two steps into the room, and addressing the fair lady directly, he said, in a distinct tone: "Madam, did you send your page to find me and bring me hither?"

"Good Heavens, no!" ejaculated the lady, with every appearance of terror.

"Send for *you*!" cried the old gentleman, angrily, "a common soldier, a dragoon! Are you mad? Who are you?"

"I am sorry you have forgotten me so soon," said Gerald, somewhat sadly, as he turned his face to the door. "I can only say that I was brought hither blindfold by a page, who knew me as the person who saved this lady's life a week ago. If I was brought here to make sport of, take your fill, madam. An Irish gentleman never resents a lady's ill-usage."

During this speech the old gentleman had been listening attentively, and scanning Gerald's face keenly. When he had finished, he said:

"Do you mean that madam's page brought you here, monsieur?"

"I do," said Gerald, coldly.

"Then here is some dark work," suddenly exclaimed the lady herself, who had been listening to the conversation, and growing calmer.

"And if I mistake not, madame la baronne, this is the same gallant youth who saved you from the stag's horns the other day," said the gentleman.

In a moment the lady had flown toward Gerald.

"It is thou, indeed," she cried; "and in danger again for me."

CHAPTER VII.

A BEAUTIFUL GUIDE.

FROM that moment the situation was changed. The blonde lady came close to Gerald with strange intentness, and placing both hands upon his shoulders, looked earnestly into his face.

The volunteer blushed like a girl under the scrutiny, while the lady seemed entirely unconscious of any impropriety. She had the air of one used to command every one round her, and earnest as was her gaze, there was none of that tremulous eagerness that accompanies love.

At last she withdrew, with a long sigh, saying:

"It is thou, indeed, poor boy, and I shall know thee now."

Gerald was intoxicated, as with some sweet and subtle perfume, by every word and action of this strangely fascinating being. The very form of address she used to him—the second person singular—has in French a peculiarly sweet and caressing meaning, used in family intercourse and between lovers.

Then the lady addressed him with the same sweet freedom, saying:

"What is thy name, my friend?"

"Gerald Desmond," replied the soldier.

"And thy regiment, what is it?" she pursued.

"Clare's Irish cuirassiers," he answered, proudly, for his corps was famous in France.

"Thy rank?"

"Simple soldier and volunteer."

The lady hummed a little tune, as if considering. Then she abruptly asked:

"Wouldst thou be an officer?"

Gerald started.

"Madame—I—I—of course every soldier is ambitious."

"Good," she said, nodding her head, with a strange, absent look, as if she was thinking of something else. "You shall be one to-night. Shall he not, Therese?"

As she spoke she turned to the younger lady, who sat on the couch, a little way off, looking on at this strange scene in perfect stillness, without any expression of wonder. With the tact of high-breeding—for it was evident that all those people were of high rank—both she and the old gentleman had resumed their usual quiet demeanor, as if nothing had occurred to disturb them.

Now Mademoiselle Therese, as she was addressed, raised her great dark eyes to those of Gerald, and instantly dropped them, with a vivid blush, as she said, in a low tone:

"I am sure monsieur deserves it, Antoinette, for his gallantry in rescuing you the other day."

The lady who was called Antoinette went rapidly to a little bureau, of which the front, like all the furniture in that room, was thickly crusted with ivory, and opened a drawer.

She drew out therefrom a parchment covered with writing, and bearing a huge green seal, seized a pen which lay on the top of the bureau, and turned to Desmond.

"Spell your name," she said, in the rapid, imperious manner in which she did every thing.

Gerald obeyed, and she wrote the name in a blank space on the parchment, in two places, then handed it to him with the ink still wet, saying:

"There, thy commission as captain in the carabineers. It is thine. Take care of it."

Then, while Gerald gazed with stupefied amazement at the parchment, with the sign manual of Louis XV. at the foot as plain as could be, the lady turned to the old gentleman, who was still sitting by the fire, and said:

"Will you see to the orders being issued, Arouet, that our captain may have no trouble?"

"Certainly, madame," he replied, briskly, rising.

"Young man, you are lucky to have found Madame Antoinette to-night, I can tell you."

Gerald could only bow, and stammer out his gratitude and surprise in a few bungling words, when Arouet continued:

"And we do not yet know, monsieur, to what combination of circumstances we owe this unexpected visit of yours. Madame Antoinette has been kind enough to overlook the accident, but at least she would like to know how you came to be at that door, without notice or warning. Do you know where you are?"

"Frankly, no," said Gerald.

The ladies exchanged quick glances.

"Do you mean to say," began Madame Antoinette, sharply, "that you do not know where you are, and who I am?"

"I do not," said the volunteer, simply. Then he entered into a history of how and why he had come, to all of which the three listened with great intent-

ness. When he had finished, Madame Antoinette turned to Monsieur Arouet, and said, in a low tone:

"It is he, without doubt. I recognize his work."

Arouet merely shrugged his shoulders.

"If a man were to tempt me like that," he said, "I would let him have the benefit of the crime, if I were a lady, which I am not."

And he twisted his keen old face in a sarcastic grin.

Madame Antoinette turned on him with her quick, imperious manner.

"And I, on the contrary, shall do no such thing. Do you not see that it is a plot against this youth's life, because—"

Here she leaned over and whispered in the other's ear.

Monsieur Arouet's face underwent a change as he listened.

"Parbleu!" he exclaimed, "that is sufficiently likely. But I, too, have something to say in that quarter. Monsieur may play his cards as well as he likes; this young man came in by chance, and he shall not be cheated of the stakes."

"So I say," repeated Madame Antoinette, firmly. "Now, *mon ami*, what shall we do?"

"Leave it to me," said Arouet.

Then he turned to the Irish volunteer, saying, gravely:

"Monsieur, you are to understand that you have had a narrow escape to-night, and that you have fallen on your feet with wonderful luck. The boy who inveigled you hither is not a servant of Madame Antoinette, but of—well—of some one else, who is your deadly enemy. It is probable that you have been followed hither, and may be waylaid as you go out. Are you armed?"

"I am," said Gerald, shortly. He felt like a man falling from a high precipice, quite disillusionized.

Arouet noticed his blank look, and added, with rare tact:

"My young friend, consider that if an enemy allured you hither, you have found friends in three people, who may do you good service. Madame Antoinette has placed you on the first step of the ladder to-night. Try to climb so high that you will do credit to your protectress. I will see you out myself at the private door. Draw your sword and prepare to cut your way out. You are a soldier and used to these things. But, live or die, remember that your honor is pledged never to betray Madame Antoinette."

The young soldier, for all answer, sunk at the feet of the beautiful lady, who extended her hand to him with a sweet smile. He covered it with kisses, then rising, bowed low to Mademoiselle Therese, and followed Monsieur Arouet from the room.

He had hardly left it, when Therese sprung forward and spoke rapidly and impetuously to Madame Antoinette.

"Antoinette, he is going to be murdered. Can we not save him?"

"He is a soldier, *ma chere*," said the lady, quietly, "and must take his chances."

"Not of assassination," cried the young girl, energetically. "It must not, it shall not be, my sister. He *must* be saved!"

"But how, how?" asked the lady, impatiently. "If his own skill is insufficient to defend him, I have done all I can to help him."

"Then I will save him," cried Therese, her eyes sparkling as she hastily caught up a hooded cloak of white satin lined with swan's-down, and threw it over her shoulders. "They shall think he is my lover, and I will defy them to harm him."

"Therese, you are mad," cried Antoinette, hastily. "Consider, your name, your reputation—"

"Reputation!" echoed Therese, scornfully. "What is that at this court?"

Before Madame Antoinette could stop her she had flown across the two outer rooms, down the corridor and stairs, and ran swiftly down the stone passage below into the little square garden where she found Arouet in the very act of unlocking the garden gate to give egress to Desmond.

"Stop, stop," she cried, in agitated accents. At the word she was obeyed.

Then she swept up like a whirlwind to Arouet, snatched the candle from his hand, and opened the door herself.

"Retire, Monsieur Arouet," she said, waving her hand with a grand, imperial manner; "twice has this gentleman exposed his life for our house. It is fitting that one of us should share his perils now."

Before the astonished Arouet could utter a word she had flung open the door, and, signing to Desmond to follow, led the way out of the alley, candle in hand, with a firm step.

Gerald was unconscious of the danger that impended, but he felt that it was of some nature that rendered this act imprudent. Firmly but respectfully he seized the young lady and drew her back; then placing himself before her, drew his sword.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle Therese," he said; "it is a man's place to meet perils first. You must retire, or at least only follow."

"I will do the last," she said, in a clear, distinct tone, audible in the street; "God prosper you, monsieur. Strike and spare not."

Without a word, Gerald wrapped his cloak round his left arm for a shield and marched out, the girl following, holding the light.

A moment later, two masked men rushed at him with drawn swords.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN IRISHMAN'S HONOR.

HAD the volunteer been taken by surprise, his assassins would in all probability have succeeded in their efforts. As it was, expecting an attack, he was prepared for it. He received the thrust of the left-hand man in the thick folds of his cloak, parried the other with his rapier, and leaped into the street, whirling round so as to wrench one weapon almost from his adversary's grasp, and bring them both on the same side of him. It was then the work of a moment to stab the entangled assassin on his left in the throat thrice, with a quick, nervous motion.

He might not have fared so well at this, but for unforeseen help. At the instant he leaped into the street, Jack Carroll strode forth with drawn sword, with a furious Irish curse, and fell on his right-hand antagonist, thrusting with a vigor that sent the other

reeling back, and retreating, in the vain endeavor to escape the enraged Irish trooper.

A moment later, the Frenchman tripped on the slippery stones and came on his back, while Carroll, setting his foot on his chest, his sword-point to the other's throat, growled out:

"Surrender, ye French thief, or by the big bell of Athlone, I'll spit ye like a lark, ye dirty coward, so ye are!"

The assassins were totally discomfited, for Gerald's enemy had fallen mortally wounded when Mademoiselle Therese, who had watched the whole struggle, suddenly emerged from the dark alley-way, holding the light, which cast an aureole around her beautiful head, and running to Carroll cried:

"Monsieur, monsieur, for my sake spare him! He is my brother."

The Irishman drew back with amazement and admiration on his countenance.

"Holy Moses, if it isn't an angel!"

Then, as he scanned the pleading, beautiful face and costly dress, he suddenly drew back with great respect.

"If you wish it, mademoiselle, he is safe; but he must unmask."

Here Gerald, who had disengaged himself from his dying antagonist, came up, and the young lady turned to him imploringly:

"Monsieur Desmond, be merciful. You have the secrets of a family in your hands by an unhappy accident. Remember, the honor of Antoinette is involved in this matter. Ask no questions, but go, for our sakes."

Gerald looked hesitatingly at the assassin. He lay sullenly in the place where he had fallen, his eyes glaring through the holes in the mask, without uttering a word. It was very hard to let him go without being able to recognize so deadly and treacherous a foe; but the Irish volunteer was the soul of honor.

"In that case, mademoiselle," he said gravely, "we will take our departure. For this cavalier, he owes his life solely to your intercession."

He bent on one knee at the feet of Therese, and kissed her hand.

"Come, Jack," he said.

Carroll removed his hat, and swept the ground with a low bow before the beautiful girl.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "if ye have any influence with this gentleman, who you is your brother, persuade him to keep clear of the Irish dragoons, for by the head of the Shan Van Vogt, it won't be healthy for him to let the boys see him; and ye may tell him that I've heard his voice, and his name, too often not to know both again."

Then he replaced his hat and stalked off, accompanied by his friend, while Therese was left alone with the fallen cavalier.

The latter waited till the dragoons were out of sight before he rose, and out of hearing before he spoke. Then he turned savagely to the girl, who stood by the arch of the alley-way, listening to the receding steps.

"So, you fool of a girl, it is you that hires Irish ruffians to dishonor our house, and stab your brother in the back?"

She turned on him, with a singular expression of measureless scorn.

"Who are you that speak, monsieur? The masked murderer or the complaisant husband?"

Then, without another word, she turned proudly away, and swept up the alley to the house. As she passed the other man, fallen, and now almost dead, she gave a visible shudder of horror; but, as if she had nerved herself to the task, she passed on into the open court, leaving the little garden gate wide open.

The masked cavalier shook his fist at the retreating figure with stealthy ferocity, then went to the help of his dying comrade.

"Are you badly hurt?" he asked, in a cold, heartless tone.

The dying man tried to speak, thrice, but in vain. The sword had pierced the windpipe, severing the jugular vein in its passage, and a moment later he lay still and dead.

"Curse on your clumsy sword!" muttered the other assassin. "Had you done your duty, we might have killed the hound. As it is, there is only one thing left—to hush up the scandal!"

As he spoke, he dragged the body up the alley into the mysterious house. A little later, the garden gate was closed and all still.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUDDEN TRANSFORMATION.

THE trumpet sounded "To horse" outside the barracks of Clare's dragoons, and the men, in full uniform, were leading out their horses from the stables to the parade-ground.

Gerald and his friend Carroll were in the same squadron, and in common with the other gentlemen volunteers, occupied the right of the line. The squadrons were already counted off in threes and platoons, the trumpets brayed out the "assembly," and the great regiment of cuirassiers formed in line with a ponderous tramping of horse-hoofs, while the standards tossed gayly in the wind above the plumed hats of the cavaliers.

Now a deep silence reigns along the line, as the regiments of carabineers, the black, white and gray Musketeers, and the horse-grenadiers, take their places on the right of the Irish horsemen, for the day is a grand field-day, and the Irish are on the left of the King's Household, to be reviewed in the Elysian Fields, before starting for the frontier.

Then follows the thunder of cannon, as the batteries peal out the royal salute, and a cloud of dust comes toward the center of the line, in the midst of which shine the breastplates and swords of the Body Guard, around three carriages, coming at a gallop.

Now the word rings along the line, up go the swords to a present, and Gerald sees the carriages flash by with twinkling wheels in the dust. Amid all the confusion, he catches sight of the beautiful faces of two ladies in the first carriage, and recognizes them instantly as his two friends. Then, with a clatter and a cloud, they are whirled by, and he remains sitting on his horse in a state of semi-stupefaction.

"Who can these ladies be?" he thinks.

There is not long to consider. The carriages dash down the line to the left, come whirling along the rear, and return to their first position; then the troops wheel by squadrons, and Gerald finds himself

riding away at a rapid trot, amid the clanking hosts passing in review. As he nears the reviewing point, his eyes eagerly turn to the first carriage. There is no one in it now but the well-known figure of the king, sitting with a simpering, self-satisfied air, to watch his troops pass. The ladies are gone!

With a blank feeling of disappointment the dragon passes by, and in due course regains his place, when the review is over.

And then, just as he is expecting the order to take up the homeward march, an officer, followed by a numerous suit, rides out into the open space in front of the king, and again a dead silence reigns along the line.

The officer is a man of huge and powerful frame, dressed in glittering armor in the style of a bygone age. He is somewhat corpulent, and the black, full-bottomed wig he wears can not disguise his age. On his cuirass glitter a perfect galaxy of stars and crosses, and he wears the crimson scarf of a marshal of France.

"Who is that?" whispered Gerald to his neighbor, Carroll.

"Sure and it's ould Saxe himself, bad luck to him for a plaguey ould martinet!" grumbled the Irish cuirassier.

Then the nearest officer turned his head, and said, sternly:

"Silence in the ranks, there!"

The marshal rode up to the colonel of Gerald's regiment, and said a few words to him, delivering him a paper, then rode off toward the carabineers. Gerald's heart beat fast as Lord Clare came toward the volunteers, and audibly called for:

"Gerald Desmond, gentleman volunteer."

Desmond rode out and saluted.

"Mr. Desmond," said his lordship, kindly, "you are relieved from duty in my regiment. Here is your discharge. With it is an order to report to the Duke de Richelieu. He commands the carabineers."

Gerald bowed to his horse's mane as he took the papers. Hitherto he had hardly dared to hope that his commission, given him in such a strange way, could be real. Now he began to believe in his good fortune.

He turned his horse with military promptness, and rode off to the next regiment. Marshal Saxe, with his brilliant suite, was just leaving its commander. Gerald trotted up, and saluted, in silence, a middle-aged man, with a handsome, dissipated face, who wore the uniform of colonel of the carabineers, besides the glittering star of a lieutenant-general.

It was the duke of Richelieu, grand nephew of the great cardinal, and bearing somewhat of his ancestor's intellect in his keen face.

Richelieu looked at the young man with a glance in which even his practiced muscles could not repress an expression of surprise.

"You are Captain Desmond, just assigned, I believe," he said, coldly. "I will not disguise from you, monsieur, that our officers will not be very cordial with you at first. You are noble, I presume."

"My family are earls," said Gerald, proudly. "I myself am the last of my line, and the rightful earl of Athlone, though an exile."

"It is understood," said Richelieu, airily waving his hand. "Of course his majesty would not have commissioned you if you had not been noble. Well, sir, you are allowed three days for your outfit, when you will report to me for duty. Meanwhile, you are to apply to the quartermaster-general for quarters, presenting this order."

He handed the new captain a paper, and sufficiently displayed by his manner that the interview was over.

Gerald bowed low and retired, feeling strangely solitary and forlorn. His promotion had come, and with it he was separated, as by a gulf, from his former companions, while in his new regiment he was all alone, not, as yet, knowing a single person. Then, too, his outfit puzzled him not a little. He was almost penniless, and an exile. At home, his estates had been confiscated in the time of his grandfather, and the last earl of Athlone had dropped his title when he was driven to serve as a private soldier.

A glance at the splendid uniforms of the carabineers had satisfied the young captain that a heavy sum would be needed for his outfit, of which he had nothing, save horse and arms.

Full of despondency, spite of his promotion, Gerald rode slowly off to the address indorsed on the paper handed him by Richelieu. As he went, the great line of review broke up, and the troops took their way home. With a strange, sad feeling of loneliness, Desmond watched his old regiment file off toward the stables, and found himself almost alone on the parade.

The court carriages had driven off, and Marshal Saxe, with his brilliant staff, was leaving the place. The young soldier galloped after him, and soon found the quartermaster-general, to whom he delivered his order.

This official, a perfect courtier, was all smiles and affability. At the same time, like Richelieu, he scanned the new-comer with visible curiosity, and as he gave him a billet to a certain quarter of the palace, he said, with a significant grin:

"Monsieur le capitaine is a very happy man. I hope that he will not forget that I have befriended him. It is not every one who has had the luck of monsieur le capitaine. He will find the quarters comfortable, I hope."

Gerald thanked him and retired, more than ever puzzled at the mystery that surrounded him. He went to his new quarters, and found to his surprise that they were on the ground floor of the Tuileries itself, two large and lofty rooms, furnished with all the heavy magnificence of the day.

But he was in as great a quandary as ever as to means of living. He had a horse, which he had just tied to a tree, and here it was, late in the afternoon, and he had neither food, forage nor money, save a few francs. What was to be done?

Completely at a loss, he stood in the doorway of his new apartments, looking gloomily out on the Tuileries gardens, and feeling at the moment as if he would rather be back in the ranks again, where he had no cares, and where his pay was sufficient for his wants.

As he stood thus, he soon spied a well-known figure approaching him, mounted on a sober cob, and followed by three servants with led horses.

"Monsieur Arouet," he exclaimed, joyfully, as that eccentric gentleman approached him, wrapped

as usual in his roquelaure of brown, "I am glad to see you."

"And I have only to say, monsieur, as I said the other night, that you are a remarkably lucky man," said Arouet, with his dry, cynical grin. "Do you know that I have come on purpose to see you, a thing I have refused to do to dukes?"

"I hardly dared hope it," said Gerald, frankly; "but I knew you were my friend, and I rejoice to see your face."

"Is it possible? Well, I, on the contrary, am no man's friend. Do not deceive yourself. I care nothing for you, but your intellect. But I see in you a man of action. I adore action. It is the end of man. So I have come hither to do you a favor. Heh! you do not know what it is?"

"I can guess, monsieur, but I say nothing."

"You have reason. See your equipments. I have it here, fit for a captain and a count. You are a count of Ireland?"

"By right, yes; but I have dropped the title."

"Aha! you have wit. Well, here is your servant, and here are two battle-horses for yourself, with trunks and apparel fit for your station. I will furnish you with all the means necessary, and that will be ten thousand francs in all. Now, monsieur le comte, what say you, will you sign me a bond for repayment with interest?"

Gerald hesitated.

"Monsieur Arouet, I do not see what I have to offer as security."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed the other, laughing, "but these soldiers are not all alike. Some would grasp at the offer and sign anything. Decidedly, you are a curious young man. If I wished security I would not be here. You are a man of honor. Sign this bond and you are rich."

"What does it contain?" asked Desmond, doubtfully. His sudden fortune seemed too good to be true.

Arouet looked at him keenly. Then he said, in a low tone:

"Sign it without speaking before these servants. It is the wish of Madame Antoinette. See here."

He handed him a little pink note. Gerald opened it with trembling hands. It ran thus:

"Do whatever Arouet bids you. He and I will protect you from the enemies that surround you. It is necessary that you should obey him."

Gerald turned to Arouet.

"Monsieur, I am in your hands. For her sake I will sign the bond, and I put you to your honor to make no improper use of my imprudence."

Arouet bowed and smiled his very rare smile.

"Young man," he said, gravely, "you love like the knights of old, and you make a worn-out courtier think well of humanity. I will tell you what is in this bond. It is a promise to pay ten thousand francs within three years, to obey my orders when not contrary to the king's, and to give me interest at twelve per cent a year."

"Had I been left alone," said Gerald, quietly, "I would never have signed it. As it is, I do it for her sake. Be pleased to wait."

He went into his new apartments, caught up a pen and signed the bond, then delivered it to Arouet, without a word. The eccentric gentleman put it in his breast with equal silence, then turned to the servants:

"Behold your master," he said, curtly. "Farewell, count."

Without further adieu he rode slowly away, and before he had passed the long walk, up came an orderly of the body-guard, full gallop, who jumped off his horse and saluted Gerald.

"Captain Count Desmond of the Second Carabineers?"

"The same. What is it?"

"Orders, monsieur le comte."

A moment later he was gone, leaving Gerald looking at a great white package directed "Captain Count Desmond."

He opened it and read as follows:

"Captain Count Desmond will immediately proceed to the frontier, where he will report to Marshal Cormontaigne in the trenches at Tournay, if he does not meet him sooner. He will proceed by way of Meaux, St. Quentin, and Douay, and will be accompanied by thirty troopers, who will report to him tonight. By his majesty's orders."

"CHAUVELIN, Sec."

Even as Gerald raised his eyes from the paper he heard the clatter of weapons, and beheld the party of carabineers trotting up to his quarters to report.

CHAPTER X.

A PERILOUS COMMISSION.

A narrow country lane in French Flanders wound here and there through fertile fields, bordered with thick hedges. The country was of that rich and closely cultivated kind, intersected with fences and ditches, that is exceedingly dangerous for cavalry to pass through, while the great weeping trees that stood at intervals along the hedges, made the scene equally delightful to an artist.

Down this narrow lane rode a long file of horsemen, in white coats faced with crimson, wearing glittering breastplates, and broad, laced hats over their white wigs. They looked fitter for Paris pavements than active service, but they were none the less the famous carabineers of the French king's household, the most redoubtable troops of their day at a charge.

At the head of the party rode a young officer, with white plume in his hat, glittering gold aiguillettes hanging over his breastplate, while his horse's housings were bordered with gold lace. In the rear of the party followed several loaded sumpter-horses.

The officer was of course our old friend Gerald, now recognized as Captain Count Desmond, and he was approaching the end of his journey. Every now and then the sullen boom of a distant gun announced the approach to the city of Tournay, closely invested by the renowned engineer Cormontaigne, the successor of Vauban. The golden glow of sunset was over the landscape, and the horses pressed cheerfully on, scenting the camp from afar, and recognizing it with equine instinct.

"What say you, sergeant?" asked our hero. "You have been here before. How far is it yet to Tournay?"

"About five miles, *mon capitaine*."

"And yonder grove of trees, with those towers surmounting it. What is that, sergeant?"

"It used to be the head-quarters of the marshal, captain, but I hear he has moved in closer to the city."

"Then we shall soon meet the pickets."

He had hardly spoken when the lane gave a turn, and a soldier in the middle of the road cocked his carbine, with a sonorous "Halt!"

The party stopped and Gerald rode forward alone to answer the questions of the vidette.

"Who are you, and from whence?"

"Captain of Carabineers, to report to the marshal."

"You can not pass till the officer arrives with the relief."

"How long will that be?"

"When the sun goes down. I expect them every moment."

"Where are the marshal's quarters?"

"In the camp, captain, but he generally comes round regularly to visit the pickets. Hark, they approach even now."

Gerald listened and heard the tramp of horses and the clatter of accouterments in the lane at the next turning. Presently a large party of horsemen approached, preceded by two men with raised carbines, the party being a glittering cavalcade of staff officers surrounding a gray-headed officer, in the uniform of a marshal of France.

Gerald reined back respectfully.

"Marshal Cormontaigne," said the picket, in a low tone.

Presently up came the marshal, and halted in front of Gerald.

"Who are you, monsieur?" he asked, sharply.

"Captain Desmond, monsieur le marechal, to report to you."

The marshal's countenance grew grave, and he scanned Gerald with a strange look.

"You are prompt, monsieur. I did not expect you till to-morrow. I have received orders about you. Ride with me and I will tell you."

Then he turned to a dark, gloomy-looking officer on his staff.

"Baron d' Etioles, take charge of monsieur's party and see them quartered near my tent. They will be my escort, till his majesty arrives. Captain Desmond, Lieutenant Baron d' Etioles, of your squadron. You will be comrades in future. Baron, this is Captain Count Desmond."

The two young men saluted with stiff courtesy. Gerald could not tell the reason, but he experienced a singular dislike to the baron at first sight, a feeling which the other seemed to reciprocate, from his cold and disagreeable manner. And yet the baron was a very handsome man, with an unmistakable air of haughty nobility.

The two parties now separated, and Gerald found himself riding alone with the marshal, who soon entered into conversation.

"Monsieur le comte," he said, "I have orders to send you on a very peculiar and dangerous service, for which I heartily wish his majesty had chosen a person of less consideration. But, as you are aware, the king's orders must not be questioned."

"What is the service, monsieur le marechal?" asked Desmond, as the old officer became suddenly silent.

"It is to take charge of a powder-mill, in a lonely forest, by a pond, within ten miles of the English outposts," said the marshal, in a low voice. "The garrison is small, there is every likelihood that the enemy may attack it, the powder is useless out there, and we want it; yet I have strict orders not to dismantle it, till his majesty comes to join the troops."

"When am I to go there?" asked Gerald.

"To-night, as soon as we get back to camp," replied the marshal. "By-the-by, you came from Clare's cuirassiers, did you not?"

"Yes," said Gerald, wondering.

"Well, there is an officer of your old regiment, a new promotion, one Sub-lieutenant Carroll, who arrived here this morning. The orders specify him as your second in command."

"Jack Carroll here, monsieur! Oh, that is indeed good news. He is my sworn comrade. Now we shall perform our duty well."

The marshal looked keenly but kindly at the young man as they rode along.

"Monsieur le comte," he said abruptly, "I like you and your comrade. Tell me, have you any reason to believe you have an enemy at court?"

"I do not know, monsieur le marechal. I have at least one good friend there."

"Ah! who is that?"

"Monsieur, I do not even know her name, except as Madame Antoinette. It is through her I obtained my commission."

Cormontaigne looked at him again, from under his gray brows.

"Indeed—well, well—I do not wonder," he muttered.

Then he sunk into a fit of absence that lasted during the rest of the ride, and till they came into the camp by a circuitous route.

There they found the city of Tournay, with its low, white lines of wall, under green embankments, surrounded by a still larger city of white tents, in regular order, while the drums and trumpets were sounding "retreat," and the soldiers were answering roll-call.

The marshal invited Gerald into his tent and dispatched an orderly with some instructions, after which he sat down at a table and began scribbling at some papers.

Presently there was a tap at the tent door.

"Entrez," said the old marshal, and resumed his writing.

The next moment the gigantic figure of Carroll stood in the tent, in the dress of an officer of Clare's cuirassiers, and the friends silently grasped each other's hands.

They could not speak, out of respect to the marshal, but their eyes devoured each other with expressive glances. Cormontaigne went on writing, and for some time there was a dead silence. At last the old warrior rose, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It is finished. Messieurs, I am at your service."

"I was ordered to report to you, monsieur le marechal," said Carroll. "Have you any orders?"

"Yes, lieutenant. You will place yourself under

Captain Count Desmond, with ten men, and follow his directions."

"And where will I get the men, monsieur?"

"They are ready now, a detachment of volunteers for special service."

"Faith, then, I'm ready now, monsieur," said Carroll, carelessly.

"It is well. Now for you, monsieur le comte. Here are your orders."

He handed Gerald the papers on which he had been writing.

"Your instructions and authority are here. I have sent for the escort, who will be here in a few minutes. By-the-by, you will have to take care of a lady to a chateau in the vicinity of your station, count. She is Mademoiselle Le Normand, niece of the former general of the revenues. You will make the journey to-night, and the guide promises to have you there long before morning. Read your orders carefully, when you get to your post, count. There is no time now. Remember, they are to be obeyed to the letter. I hear the escort. Your servants and horses are with them. God be with you, gentlemen, and bring you safe back. When his majesty arrives, I shall press at once for your relief. At present you are on desperate duty."

The old marshal held out his hands with soldierly frankness, and the comrades grasped them with respectful cordiality. Both thought they had never met a more kind and genial leader.

Then there was a clatter of armor at the door; and a big burly sergeant of dragoons, with a hangdog face, and an ugly red scar across his nose and both cheeks, stood stiffly saluting at the door.

"Escort ready, monsieur le marechal."

"Very good, sergeant. This is Count Desmond, your leader, and Lieutenant Carroll, second in command. Who's the guide?"

"I am, so please your honor."

"See that you do your duty, sergeant."

The marshal spoke in a stern, sharp tone, and looked keenly at the ugly sergeant, who, Gerald saw, had but one eye.

The sergeant silently saluted, standing like a post.

"Gentlemen, good-evening," said the old marshal.

Then they left the tent, and found a party of dragoons outside, in the dusk of the evening, sitting on their horses around a covered horse-litter. Gerald's servants and led horses, and Carroll's single lackey, were in waiting, and the chargers of both officers.

They mounted, and Gerald spoke to the sergeant.

"Which way, sergeant?"

"Toward the frontier, your honor," said the man, respectfully.

Gerald gave the word, and the party moved off into the gathering gloom. As the marshal's tent was in the rear of the camp, they were soon clear of the tent; and as they approached the pickets the moon rose. The sergeant gave the word, and they were soon past, and on their way to the open country.

"And now, Jack," said Gerald, as they rode along a broad, flat road, bordered with willows, with a ditch on each side, for miles ahead, "tell me how, in the name of all that is wonderful, you came here, with a commission?"

"Asy enough, darlin'," said the giant, coolly.

"Sure I was the senior volunteer, and they've been fillin' the squadrons. Clare behaved like a gentleman entirely, and helped me to buy epaulettes and such. But if that's a quare thing, what d'ye think of this?"

He lowered his tone cautiously.

"D'ye mind the purty crature that came out, the time ye pinked the Frenchman in the street by the alley?"

"Yes, yes," said Gerald, eagerly. "What then?"

"She's in the litter, *beyant*," said Carroll, in a whisper. "Sure it bates me entirely what she's doin' here, but I'll go bail she's the same."

"Impossible!" ejaculated the young count—"and yet, if so—"

He sunk into a profound reverie, and Carroll was equally silent. The cavalcade pursued its eastward march.

CHAPTER XI.

TEACHING A MAN MANNERS.

THE road on which our adventurers were traveling went on, straight as an arrow, mile after mile, over the same unvarying flat, with the same eternal row of pollard willows on each side. The landscape was more Dutch than Flemish, in its monotony, and the only variety was given by the occasional spire of a village church, embowered in trees, on either hand.

For at least an hour the steady tramp of the horses and the dull jingle of accouterments were the only sounds audible. The men in the escort kept strict silence, or conversed in occasional muttered words, the two officers were buried in thought, and the occupant of the litter, whoever she might be, was as silent as if inanimate.

The sergeant, who officiated as guide, rode on ahead, and so they kept on, till the road gave a sweep to the left, meeting another road at an acute angle.

Here Gerald trotted up to the sergeant, and demanded:

"Which do we take, sergeant?"

"The left hand," responded the man, gruffly. He seemed to have lost in a moment all the respect he had shown in camp.

"Whom are you addressing?" cried Gerald, sharply. "Do they omit to teach manners to their soldiers in your regiment? Salute when you address me, sir."

The sergeant turned his face on Gerald, with a forbidding scowl.

"My regiment is of Picardy," he said, savagely, "and we have no Irish—"

The words were not out of his mouth, when Gerald struck him with his clenched fist a blow that sent him over the side of his horse, and the young captain, at the same moment, tipped the foot in the stirrup nearest to him with the toe of his own heavy boot. The result of the maneuver was, that the sergeant tipped out of his saddle and came down on his head in the hard road.

"Now, my friend," said Gerald, coolly, "you'll learn respect to all officers, of whatever regiment, after this. Get up, and tell me civilly, where does the other road lead to?"

The discomfited sergeant rose to his feet, with the blood streaming down his face. His demeanor was entirely altered now, being humble even to servility.

"The other road leads to Brussels, captain," he said. "The English are on it, about ten miles off."

"How far are we from our destination?"

"From the Chateau Dillon, about three miles, monsieur le comte," said the sergeant, still more humbly; "from the powder-mill, five."

"What is your name?" asked Gerald, sternly.

"Jean Bonard, monsieur le comte, but they know me best as 'Le Borgne' (One-Eye)."

"Well, master Bonard," said Gerald, authoritatively, "get on your horse and lead on. It's lucky you were not insolent to Lieutenant Carroll, for he would have dashed your brains out."

The sergeant humbly removed his hat, and then mounted his horse, just as the rest of the party came up. Without another word he led on in the new road, while Gerald sat still on his horse and allowed the party to pass him. The behavior of the sergeant had roused a suspicion in his mind that the rest of his party might be of the same kind, desperate characters, hard to control. The lesson he had given their chief seemed to have sobered the latter completely, and the young captain desired to inspect the rest. He made an imperceptible sign to Carroll, who was hesitating whether to speak, to move on, and by slowly falling to the rear, took a good look at every man's face as he passed.

When he had concluded the inspection, he thought to himself that he had seldom seen a more desperate-looking set of fellows, every man with the hardened look of an old criminal, rather than a soldier.

Touching his horse with the spur, he cantered up to regain his place, and in so doing passed the curtains of the horse-litter. As he did so, he cast a curious glance that way, and beheld the curtains parted, while the inmate beckoned to him with a white arm. He could not see her face, which was behind the curtain.

In a moment Gerald was beside the litter.

"Fall back," he said, curtly, to the nearest guard, "and you, the next, ride ahead. We wish to talk."

Both men obeyed with perfect docility. It was evident that they had witnessed the summary treatment of "Le Borgne," and were not yet prepared to show open insubordination.

"Monsieur," whispered a sweet voice, the next moment, "I can not be mistaken in your face. You are Count Desmoulin."

"And you are Mademoiselle Therese," said Gerald, in a low tone. "I am sure of it."

"I am Therese Le Normand," answered the lady, softly, and she put out a little white hand in the moonlight. Gerald took it, and felt a gentle pressure of the soft palm, as he raised it to his lips.

"Monsieur le comte," said Therese, still in a whisper, "do you know that you are going to great dangers?"

"I have been told so," said Gerald, somewhat stiffly.

"You are going to great danger," she repeated; "and for the sake of her whom you saved from death. One peril you have escaped by skill with the sword. The next will be far more deadly."

"Then why are you here?" asked Gerald, unable to conceal his surprise. "If I am in danger, you are still more so."

"I am in no danger," she answered. "Not one of these wretches that are around you would dare to harm a hair of my head."

"Then why are you here?" he asked again.

"Antoinette sent me," she answered. "You have powerful enemies, and I am the only one that can save you."

"Indeed, mademoiselle," said Gerald, politely, but a little coldly; "it must be confessed that you put me in a curious position. A soldier looking to protection from a lady."

Therese heaved a deep sigh. Hitherto she had retained his hand as if she was unconscious of what he was doing. Now she suddenly threw it away with a petulant motion.

"Go away then," she said. "You are insensate. Leave me."

The next minute the curtains of the litter were closed tightly, and Gerald found himself shut out from further intercourse with the young lady. It must be confessed that he turned away himself with a feeling of something like pique.

He was deeply, irretrievably in love with Madame Antoinette, and on the other hand, he had only seen Madame Therese once, and was by no means in love with her. Indeed, he felt guilty at allowing himself to assume a tender tone toward her, as a sort of breach of fidelity to the fair one he adored. Yet there was something so pleasant in the sweet, almost caressing manner of Therese, that her sudden revulsion to anger and coldness, struck him with a nameless chill.

With compressed lips, he spurred away from the dangerous vicinity, and arrived at the head of the party, where he found that during the short conversation, the character of the road had changed. It was now climbing a gentle ascent, and the dark outline of a forest frowned before it in the moonlight. Carroll was riding at the head of the party, and silently pointed ahead. The towers of a castle loomed above the trees.

"I'm thinking there's the place to have the lady," he said. "Sergeant Bonard tells me it's called Chateau Dillon, though how an Irishman comes to own it, is more than I can tell."

"Has Bonard been civil?" asked Gerald.

"Faith and he's as soft as a cat askin' for crame, since ye gave him that little tap. Ye did it well, Gerald. I couldn't have bettered it myself."

"Well, then, I think that you and I together can keep the rest in order—eh, Jack? They're a rough party, but they won't mutiny just yet."

"True for ye, my boy, it's little I care for them in a mutiny. But where are we to go, Gerald?"

"I'll tell you as we go along. Meantime, we must see to our duty."

The one-eyed sergeant here rode back and, hat in hand, reported that they had reached Chateau Dillon.

A few moments later, the escort passed up an avenue of giant elms and halted before a wide cavernous portal, at which appeared a train of servants bearing lights, as if the guard had been expected.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UGLY PLACE.

GERALD dismounted from his horse, and advanced to the litter. The curtains were already drawn back, and he perceived that Therese Le Normand was masked, in the fashion of ladies traveling in those days. He assisted her, in silence, to dismount, and handed her up the steps to where a group of servants stood awaiting her.

Then he drew back and bowed respectfully. "Has mademoiselle any further orders? If not, my duty is done."

"I have nothing but my thanks for your escort, monsieur," said Therese, in her sweet tones. Then she added, in a whisper, "Be cautious for my sake—no, I mean for hers."

Gerald bowed still lower. There was a tender solicitude in the tone that penetrated his heart in spite of his devotion to another.

"I will be cautious, as far as my duty permits," he said.

Then he turned and descended the steps, remounted his horse, the lady entered the house, the door closed and the party of dragoons was riding slowly down the avenue.

Desmond and Carroll kept together at the head, and conversed in low tones, while Sergeant Bonard acted as an advance.

"We are going on desperate service, Jack," began Gerald. "What the danger is I do not know, but the marshal seemed to think it great. He warned me to read my orders carefully and obey them to the letter, but what they are I do not know yet, except that we are to occupy a powder-mill, within two miles of the English outposts."

"A powder-mill! Holy Moses!" ejaculated Carroll. "What the devil do they want to be puttin' a temptation into the Englishmen's way for, to put a hot shot into us, and send us all to glory?"

"Those are our orders, that's all I can say."

"Mighty quare orders, then. Where is this blessed old mill?"

"Bonard is leading us there."

The young captain gave the word, and the little column quickened its pace and trotted along the road. The latter had changed from a broad, hard stone road to a narrow, soft bridle-path, winding here and there amid a wood that grew darker and darker every moment.

In place of the oaks and beeches that surrounded the Chateau Dillon, the trees were now mostly firs, dark and somber in hue, and excluding the wind. A deep stillness was over the forest, and the footsteps of the horses, muffled in the sandy soil, were dull and faint. The jingle of accouterments was lost in the soft masses of foliage that acted as a cushion to absorb sound, and insensibly the influence of the scene weighed on the spirits of the party, who sunk into dead silence, even the officers ceasing to converse.

Mile after mile of the solemn wood they traversed in the pale moonlight, the road winding here and there, the scene remaining of the same dull and lugubrious character.

Every now and then, where the path grew broader, they could see the tracks of wheels, old and nearly effaced, but the absence of other marks proved that the road was seldom traversed.

After ten minutes' trotting they sunk into a steady, rapid walk, the horses stepping out in a long, slashing gait, as cavalry horses are wont to do on night marches.

At last Bonard, who was in advance, halted, and as the party came up, they instinctively followed his example.

"We are close to the mill," said Le Borgne, in a low tone. "At the next turn we shall come on the sentry. Is it your pleasure to advance, monsieur le comte, or shall I give the watchword?"

"What is it?" asked Gerald, who remembered for the first time that he had it not.

"It is Neerwinden," said One-Eye, respectfully.

"Then you may give it," said the captain, after a moment's hesitation.

Le Borgne saluted and rode on.

A moment later they were challenged by a sentry from the side of the road. The column halted, Le Borgne dismounted and advanced on foot, and a muttered conversation ensued between the sergeant and the sentry, which lasted much longer than the usual formality.

Gerald grew impatient and suspicious at once.

"Hola, Bonard," he exclaimed, "what's the matter? We can't stay here all night. Is the word correct or not?"

He heard a few rapid mutterings, and then the voice of the sentry said, in a sulky tone:

"Countersign correct. Advance, relief guard."

"Relief guard!" echoed the captain, spurring forward to the man. "Who told you this was a relief guard?"

The sentry looked up. Gerald could see that he wore the uniform of the regiment of Picardy, to which One-Eye belonged, and was equally villainous in expression.

"The sergeant said so, captain," he answered, somewhat sullenly, but making a salute at the same time. "I am only a poor soldier and knows no better than to do what I am told."

"If you do that, my friend, we shall get on," said Gerald, more kindly. "Forward, march!"

The little cavalcade moved on, and the road, after a circular sweep, came out on the borders of a large pond, around which it wound, in front of a forest of pine trees, of which many were bare and naked, others twisted and blackened, and but a few, and those of a small size, presenting a healthy appearance.

Somewhat to Gerald's surprise, the one-eyed sergeant spoke to him in a manner perfectly respectful, but more confidential than hitherto.

"The trees look wretched, sir, do they not? It was the explosion of about five years ago."

"How did it happen?" asked Gerald, interested.

"The artillery train was here, monsieur, loading up, and no one knows how it came. It may have been a boot-nail struck fire. Anyway, I remember it well. I was near here, by the lakeside, and saw a great white flash over at the house yonder. Monsieur sees it?"

Gerald looked across the pond and saw a great black shed in a bare patch surrounded with trees. Five or six tents were near it, by the water's edge, and a red lantern was hung on the top of a pole in the midst.

"That is the mill, monsieur le comte. In a moment the air seemed full of fire, and I, who was at the other side of the lake, was blown into the bushes and knocked senseless. When I came to, monsieur, I shall never forget the sight. Men were lying about, on the land and in the water, all torn to pieces. 'Twas there I lost the sight of my eye, and got that scar."

Insensibly Gerald's heart softened as Le Borgne spoke. He accused himself of having taken a dislike to him for his scarred face, and wished to make up to him for his injustice.

"Never mind, sergeant," he said, kindly. "Many a soldier has got a wound in a worse way. Only be faithful to orders, and you and I will never quarrel again."

Le Borgne made a rueful grimace.

"I hope not, monsieur le comte. I own it is the fashion of us soldiers to try the patience of new officers, but we bear no ill-will to one that puts us down. The men will stick to you, monsieur. The path turns here."

The pond was here filled in by a straight-edged embankment for a considerable distance, leaving a broad esplanade, which seemed to be covered with dried clay, for it echoed loudly under the feet of the horses, in contrast to the soft sand that had hitherto made the road.

Gerald halted and dismounted his party.

"Jack," he said to Carroll, "we are in a dangerous place, and I don't mean to run any risks by taking shod horses over gritty sand. Keep the men here while I go on with the sergeant to find who is there."

"True for ye," said Carroll, uneasily. "It's a mighty quare position intirely. I'll be glad of daylight."

"Not more than I shall," said Gerald, in a low tone.

Then he and the sergeant crossed the esplanade on foot, and approached the white tents and the red lantern.

There is something peculiarly awe-inspiring to a soldier in the vicinity of a powder magazine. Accustomed as he is to witness the destructive effects of powder in small quantities, when he comes in the presence of hundreds of barrels, he inevitably feels subdued. If this is the case in a heavy, stone casemate where the powder is carefully stored away, the access of visitors barred, and where every precaution is taken to prevent danger, the case is magnified where he comes to a frail wooden shed in a forest, without even a fence around it to keep off any stray animal that might wander in, and where the powder lies around loose on the floor, or floats in fine, black dust out of every crevice.

As Gerald and the sergeant approached the tents, moreover, a fresh source of uneasiness was discovered. Gerald thought that he perceived a glimmering light near the water's edge, not far from the post which held the lantern.

"Come this way, Bonard," he said, curtly, and bent his steps thither.

What was his surprise, and for the moment consternation, to find that the glimmering light was neither more nor less than the dull red embers of a little wood-fire! It was covered with ashes, it is true, but the end of a blackened stick had been left protruding, and a red line of smoldering sparks was creeping out into the air!

Without a moment's hesitation, Gerald withdrew the stick, and threw it into the pond, where it expired with a hiss. Then he took off his hat.

"Come, Bonard," he said, in a low tone of anxiety, "drown every spark. These fellows must be mad."

The one-eyed sergeant made no objections. Whatever his spirit might be, he was too sensible not to perceive that the lives of all present were in danger while the fire was alight. Without a word, captain and sergeant filled their hats with water, and deluged the fire, whence a cloud of steam instantly arose.

Not till it was completely out did Gerald turn away.

Then he said:

"Come, sergeant; they seem to be asleep. Let us awaken them."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON GUARD.

THE young captain advanced toward the tents, where all was still and silent. It struck Gerald with amazement, as contrary to all military rules, that when there was a sentry on the road outside, here there seemed to be no guard or relief.

As he approached the first tent, he was admonished by loud snores that some one was inside, and asleep.

"Pretty work, this," he said angrily, as he seized the flap of the tent door and threw it back, allowing the moonlight to stream inside.

There, on the floor, around a barrel, which stood upright, lay three soldiers, fast asleep, while an extinguished candle stood on the head of the barrel, having burned down to the socket of the candlestick.

A strong smell of brandy pervaded the tent, and a tin cup, half full of liquor, standing by the candle, gave rise to a strong suspicion that the three men were dead drunk, as indeed their stertorous breathing sufficiently testified.

Gerald stood looking at them in silence for a few minutes. Then he turned to the sergeant, who stood silently by.

"A good guard they keep here, Bonard," he could not help saying, with some bitterness. "Is this your regiment of Picardy?"

The one-eyed sergeant's countenance for a moment assumed the look of a demon, and Gerald was almost sorry he had taunted him. The next it gave place to a humble and apologetic expression.

"Your honor has reason to say so," he replied, with a choked voice. "They ought to be shot."

Gerald taunted him no more. He leaned over and took the candlestick.

"Throw it into the lake," he said, briefly. "It is not your fault, sergeant."

Le Borgne saluted gravely, stalked down to the lake and threw the candlestick far into the water. Then he returned and followed Gerald to the other tents.

They were four in number. Two were piled with stores of provisions and the other two contained a man each, fast asleep. Without an exception, it turned out that every one in camp was dead drunk. In one of the tents a candle was still burning, in a

bayonet-shank, the point of the weapon being sunk in the sand, while the tent was full of straw. This light also Gerald threw into the lake, and then, with his mind somewhat easier, proceeded to the mill itself, which was about a hundred yards back of the tents.

The great black shed loomed up in the moonlight, and to his still greater surprise, he perceived that a small side-door under the gable-end of the shed was wide open.

"Well, sergeant," he said, with a forced laugh, "it must be confessed that we have a pleasant post to occupy. My only wonder is, that we find the shed still here."

"It is shameful, your honor," said the sergeant, humbly. "I am heartily thankful your honor came here to save us all."

Gerald stopped, and kicked off his heavy boots, studded with nails. He knew too well the danger of striking fire to neglect any precaution. He advanced to the little door alone, for Bonard remained as if rooted to the spot. The big sergeant was trembling from head to foot.

Gerald peered into the shed. The roof had several large gaps, through which the moonlight streamed down into the place, and he saw the orderly piles of black barrels ranged one above the other, while the floor was covered with black dust. Away in the rear of the shed he heard the dripping and regular splash of falling water, and realized that the wheel by which the grinding machinery was worked must be there. He had noticed before a narrow ditch leading from the pond beside the great shed, and saw that the ground sloped down behind the mill, where breaks in the trees afforded glimpses of an open country.

He softly closed the door, and slid the rusty bolt into its staple, then went back to Le Borgne.

"Has this mill been worked lately?" he asked.

"Not since the siege began, monsieur le comte."

"Well, that is lucky. Let us go."

They turned away, passed through the little camp, and crossed the esplanade to where they had left the horses.

As they approach, they heard the voice of the Irish lieutenant raised in sharp, angry tones.

"I don't care who the devil told ye to come back, I say ye don't go a step further, ye thief of the world. Ground yer carb ne and stand still, or I'll brain ye with the butt of this pistol."

Gerald hurried up, and found his gigantic friend standing in front of the dismounted dragoon of the regiment of Picardy, who had been acting as sentry, who had come back, and seemed to be expostulating.

"Here's this boy, comin' back off his post as if 'twas all right," said Carroll, indignantly, as Desmond came up.

"Please, monsieur, I am but obeying orders," said the soldier, in an injured tone. "The sergeant gave me orders to come back and wake up the relief when the moon was over a certain tree, and this officer has stopped me."

"What sergeant are you talking about, my friend?" asked Desmond.

"Sergeant Poirier, your honor."

"Is he in command of your squad?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Very well, my friend. I am in command here now," said Gerald, sternly; "and I have serious thoughts of shooting your whole party for neglect of duty. They are all dead drunk in the tents. As for you, stay where you are. I relieve you myself."

The dragoon made no more resistance. He stepped back into the midst of the party, to whom he seemed to be known, while Gerald beckoned Carroll to his side.

"Jack," he said, "we must keep awake all night."

"And that's 'asy said."

"Ay, but we must do it to-morrow, too, or at least only one must sleep at a time."

"I'll take the first watch, then."

"No, I must do that. The responsibility is mine."

"Very well. Anything to please ye."

"First, we must put every one of the present guard in irons."

"What for?"

"They're all dead drunk, the magazine's been left open, and candles have been burning close to heaps of straw."

"Holy Moses!"

"You may wonder. When these fellows wake up, I'll find where they got their liquor, and spill it all in the lake."

Carroll made a grimace.

"And not I have a drop?"

"Not a drop," said Gerald, firmly. "We've got an unruly lot to control at best. If they get liquor-wild then they'll be devils. Self-preservation compels the measure."

"Then it's no use talking," said Carroll, with a sigh. "It's a pity to spoil good punch with too much water, but you're commander."

Gerald could not restrain a smile at his comrade's speech, but the occasion was too serious for pleasantry. He ordered the horses to be tied to trees, leaving a single guard, and marched the rest of the men to the tents, whence, in a short time, the sleeping inebriates were brought forth, and securely bound with ropes, for there were no irons about.

Then the young captain ordered the tents to be taken down and moved away from the dangerous vicinity, with the exception of those containing stores. They were put up near the horses, and rations of forage issued, but Gerald positively forbid any cooking of food with fire, till daylight should disclose a safe place.

The men made no resistance, and discipline seemed to be perfectly established. A guard was set, and in this condition they waited for the morning, all the men sleeping, except a single sentry. The two officers were too anxious as yet to slumber.

At last the moon set and all was dark. Gerald and Carroll waited silently for the coming of the morning, and in the meantime the former removed the lantern from the tall pole, carried it over to the tents, and by its light commenced the perusal of his mysterious orders. They were all in the handwriting of Marshal Cormontaigne, and ran as follows:

"To Monsieur:

"Monsieur le comte de Desmond,

"Captain 2d Royal Carabiniers:

"CAPTAIN AND COUNT:—You are hereby ordered to

the command of the Powder Mill and Magazine at the Pond of Doigny, which you will preserve from any force which the enemy may send against you at the risk of all your lives. The party which you find there you will retain with your own, and make frequent patrols in the neighborhood of your post to ascertain if the enemy are moving toward you. If such a thing should happen, you are to delay him as long as you can, and dispatch a trusty sergeant to these head-quarters with the news. In any event, before stirring, you will lay a train to blow up the mill when the enemy arrives. You will remain at your post till relieved from these head-quarters, or by order of the king or Marshal Saxe. You will be particular to allow no strangers inside of the sentry on the road to Tournay by Chateau Dillon. If it becomes necessary to blow up the mill, and you are left alive, return to Tournay. CORMONTAIGNE."

Gerald read this aloud to his comrade, and Carroll remarked:

"It's 'asy said, detain the enemy, but how will we do it with fifteen men, and five of them drunk?"

Gerald was silent for some time. At last he said: "I see only one thing to do, Jack—our duty, and trust to Providence."

"And kape the powder dry, as ould Cromwell—bad luck to him—used to say. By the powers, Gerald Desmond, I'd not cry much if the pond was to drown the whole lot of it."

"If we could depend on our men, I'd not be so uneasy," said the young captain, thoughtfully. "What do you think of Le Borgne, Jack?"

"I think he's a gallows-bird," said Carroll, pithily, "but I think you've got him into proper civility, by the whalin' ye give him. I wouldn't trust him with a cold anvil myself."

"Good or bad, we must make the best of it now," said Gerald, yawning. "Go to sleep, Jack. Yonder's the sun rising, and I take first watch."

As he spoke the dawn broke over the scene.

CHAPTER XIV.

A POINT OF ETIQUETTE.

ABOUT noon of that day a troop of the royal carabiniers, about twenty strong, headed by the dark-looking Baron d'Etioles, passed by the avenue of the Chateau Dillon, and took the narrow road to the Pond of Doigny.

By the side of the baron was a slender Italian-faced lad, whose limbs and figure were almost feminine in their delicacy, while his countenance wore an expression of reckless bravado, natural to a spoiled page, which his dress indicated him to be.

While the rest of the party bestrode heavy dapple-gray Norman horses, the page rode a slender chestnut Arab, of fiery temper, and found it hard to restrain from walking away from its more ponderous companions.

As they passed the avenue that led to the chateau, the page uttered a sneering laugh.

"Mademoiselle is happy now, I suppose, baron, in her maiden solitude."

The baron scowled heavily at the chateau, and answered:

"I hate these devotees, Giannina. If it were not for her cursed scruples, I might be a marquis to-day."

"It's lucky some one else is more accommodating," said the disguised girl, with the same evil sneer. "Monsieur le baron may be a marquis yet if all turns out well."

"And it shall, girl, it shall," said the baron, clenching his teeth. "The time is almost come now, and she knows how to play her cards well, for the place she came from."

"What a pleasant reputation you will have then, my friend," said Giannina, flashing her wicked black eyes up at him. "We women are bad enough, but you men sometimes excel us. I am glad I'm not a man."

"You may be sorry your woman's tongue wags so fast," growled the baron, with a scowl. "What's my reputation to you, you fool?"

"Oh, nothing," she answered, lightly. "You have a nice family altogether, Etioles. What a pity your one saint should be all alone."

The baron uttered a stifled curse.

"Come on, you jade," he said, shaking his bridle; "trot up, or we shall never get there."

"It's a strange thing," pursued Giannina, tranquilly, as she cantered along beside him, "that Marshal Cormontaigne should have selected you, of all the people in the world, to reinforce this chivalrous Irish count."

Etioles's face broke into a triumphant leer.

"There's one obstacle that I can remove, at all events," he said. "I verily believe there is more danger in him than in Therese to our plans."

"You have reason, my friend. There is no telling what caprices we women take sometimes, and madame is capable of throwing aside every thing for love. He is a handsome fellow, this count, and you know he has the opposite complexion. Beauty loves contrast, Etioles."

Again the baron laughed.

"We'll spoil his beauty before we're done, however," he muttered.

Then they galloped at a round pace along the path which Gerald and his men had traveled the night before, and arrived at the turn of the road that led to the pond, only to be halted by the ominous click of a carbine, as a mounted dragoon, in the uniform of the regiment of Picardy, covered the person of Etioles with his piece. At the same moment they heard the clattering of scabbards and horse furniture a little way on, and a very big officer on a black charger moved up the road to support his vedette.

The big officer wore fierce red mustaches curling up to his eyes, and a black patch of plaster on his left cheek, and at sight of him, Etioles abruptly pulled up and trembled visibly, while he muttered to Giannina:

"He here too! Curse the luck!"

Lieutenant John Carroll, of Clare's Cuirassiers, rode tranquilly forward to the vedette, and called out to the baron:

"Well, monsieur, whither so fast? No one passes this way, ye must know."

Etioles hesitated a moment before he replied. Then he spoke in a very sweet tone of oily courtesy.

"I have orders from Marshal Cormontaigne, monsieur. Are you the captain-count Desmond?"

"His lordship, the Earl of Athlone," said Carroll, laying an emphasis on the title, "is at present asleep, having kept watch since yesterday. I am empowered to receive any orders that come to him."

"Ah, then you are—?" said Etioles, inquiringly.

"Sir John Carroll, of Castle Bally Carroll, in the county of Kilkenny, Ireland, gentleman and baronet, but unfortunately deprived of me ancestral possessions temporarily," said Carroll, with a lofty air. "Ye see, monsieur, there was a thavin' blackguard they called William of Orange, who came with an immense army of foreign cutthroats, and drove out me grandfather, along with his gracious majesty, King James the Second of blessed memory, and since that time me grandfather has thought it expedient to drop the ancestral title till we drive out the black brood of Sassenachs, and regain Castle Bally Carroll."

Having delivered this little speech with an air of charming affability, he added, as if with an afterthought:

"So at present, I'm Sub-lieutenant Carroll, of Clare's Horse, at your service, monsieur."

Etioles listened to the vaporing Celt with wonder, which he forbore to show in his face, for he had reasons for keeping the gigantic lieutenant in good humor.

He raised his hat with great courtesy.

"I am charmed to know a gentleman of such noble family, Monsieur Carroll," he said, sweetly. "We shall be comrades, I presume, for the marshal has dispatched me hither with these men to reinforce Count Desmond—well, the Count of Athlone, if you prefer it. We Frenchmen find your northern names hard to pronounce, monsieur, so you will excuse my saying Desmond so often."

Carroll removed his hat with a grandiloquent bow.

"If it's clearly understood, monsieur, that the title to the earldom of Athlone and the baronetcy of Bally Carroll are recognized and respected by you, we'll not quarrel about the difficulty of names."

"My dear sir," said the baron, with equal courtesy, "I should not for an instant think of disputing either."

"Then let it remain plain Desmond and Carroll," said the Irishman, with a lofty air. "After all we don't use English titles in France. And now, monsieur, how may I call ye?"

"Lieutenant Le Normand, of the 3d squadron, 2d regiment of Royal Carabiniers," said Etioles, adding, "the barony d'Etioles is one of my titles, but as we are comrades, monsieur, we will drop titles and be plain Carroll and Le Normand to each other."

In mentioning his title, which he could not well help, the baron slurred over the word with great rapidity. He remembered the scene in the dark street of Paris, and the terrible antagonist who had fought him down, and he trembled lest Carroll might recognize his voice and figure. On horseback there was not so much danger of this as yet. Carroll did not seem to notice anything, for he asked:

"Well, monsieur, and to what do we owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"I have already said, monsieur," replied Etioles, "that I have been ordered to report here, by Marshal Cormontaigne."

"Are the orders written, have ye them with ye?" asked Carroll, with an air of suspicion.

"Of course they are, monsieur!"

"Can I see them?"

"Monsieur," said Etioles, somewhat haughtily, "I am a full lieutenant of some years' standing in the King's Household. You are a sub-lieutenant of a week's commission."

"Faith, ye're wrong there, Le Normand. It's only five days," said Carroll, coolly, with a smile of lofty self-satisfaction. "It's not a Carroll of Bally Carroll that needs a dirty little commission to make a gentleman of him. And what then?"

"I was about to say, monsieur, that it is not military etiquette for an officer to submit his orders to the inspection of a junior."

"True for you, Le Normand."

"Then you must see, Monsieur Carroll, that your request is inadmissible. I must report to Count Desmond, who alone ranks me here."

"Faith, that's well spoken."

"Then allow me to pass."

This was said with a sudden assumption of an air of authority.

"Ye can't do it," replied Carroll, coolly.

"And why not?"

"Because it's against the orders of Captain Desmond, Earl of Athlone."

"I tell you, monsieur, I bear orders from the marshal. Are not those enough to override your earl's?"

"Possibly."

"Then why not allow me to pass?"

"Because it's against my orders."

"What the devil," began Etioles, thoroughly exasperated, "have I to do with your orders?"

"That's just what I was thinkin', darlin'," said Carroll, with a grin.

"Do you mean to say you refuse to obey Marshal Cormontaigne's order?"

"Faith, an I don't know if he's given any, yet."

"But I tell ye, he has."

"Do ye? That's queer."

Etioles drew back and glared at the cuirassier, pale with rage. For a moment he felt inclined to use the force at his command to overpower the other. On second thoughts he said, more mildly:

"Monsieur Carroll, may I ask what are your orders?"

"Well, since ye ask civilly, I'll tell ye, though I'd wish ye to state first that ye recognize ye have no right to ask."

"Well, then, tell me, only as a favor, if you please."

"With a thousand pleasures, monsieur. My orders, coming through the writing of Marshal Cormontaigne himself, are to allow no strangers from Tournay inside of this post."

"But I bear superior orders, signed by the marshal."

"Monsieur Le Normand," said Carroll, lifting his hat. "As a gentleman, I never doubt another gentleman's word. As a soldier, I wouldn't believe my own brother if he came to my feet with such a story."

"Then, in short, you wish to compel me to exhibit my orders."

"Monsieur Le Normand, you have expressed my

wishes with perfect truth. Till I see them you cannot pass."

"Will you allow me then to send in my page under charge of one of your men to wake the count, and deliver him the orders?"

"Well, that's reasonable. Where's the page?"

"Pierre, come hither." Etioles's party had halted a little way behind, while the colloquy went on. The saucy page rode up and saluted, while Carroll surveyed him from head to foot with a scrutinizing glance.

Etioles drew a paper from his breast pocket and handed it to the page.

"Take this paper, Pierre," he said, "to Count Desmond. He will send back word to admit us, which this gentleman denies."

"Sergeant Bonard," called out Carroll, "come hither."

The one-eyed sergeant rode up. He had been waiting in the road behind, with a picket of five men.

"Take this boy to the captain, and report back."

Le Borgne saluted, and rode off with the page, while Carroll turned to Etioles, saying:

"And now, monsieur, if you think that I have treated you with rudeness, I shall be very happy to render you all the satisfaction you may desire. It is the first principle of an Irish gentleman to render to every man his due, and I would not for the world be guilty of the slightest discourtesy toward you. There's an elegant bit of sand which would just do for a little brush, and we could get through, and have the losin' man put away decent and comfortable under the sand, or in the pond before the boys get back with the answer."

Etioles stared at the other with amazement.

CHAPTER XV.

THERESE'S WARNING.

"WHAT should I fight you for?" he exclaimed. "Oh, just for a little pastime, ye know; a sort of beneficent and salutary application of your wounded honor. Ye have no taste for these little playful affairs. Well, as ye please. I thought 'twould be a pleasant diversion; but if ye don't like to fight, I accept your apology."

"I believe you must really be mad," began d'Etioles, after a pause of blank surprise, when Carroll interrupted him:

"I allow no man to call a Carroll, of Bally Carroll, out of his name, monsieur," he said, curling his mustache. "Ye'll apologize for that expression at once, monsieur."

"Apologize, to you?" echoed Etioles, angrily. His blood was up at last, at the overbearing manner of the Irishman. "I'll see you in—"

"Exactly," interposed Carroll, with the utmost courtesy of smile. "I see you understand me, and we are agreed. Shall we fight on horseback, then?"

Etioles had hardly expected such a prompt acquiescence to his implied challenge, but he had gone too far to recede, and he answered haughtily: "As you please. I think you Irishmen are all mad."

"Very good, monsieur," said Carroll, with the same studied politeness. "You will please to remember that your men must not advance any further on this road, while we are having our little affair."

"It is understood," said Etioles, curtly.

"Then be pleased to accompany me, monsieur."

The pugnacious officer turned round and was about to ride back on the road to the lake, when a lady on horseback, masked in the fashion of the day, came cantering up past the column of carabiniers, and interrupted the discussion. Carroll was too thorough an Irishman to be deficient in politeness to a lady.

"Our affair must wait, monsieur," he whispered, hastily, to the astonished Etioles, as the lady checked her horse beside them.

Then he turned to her with the blandest of smiles.

"What can I do for ye, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur," she answered, in a low tone, casting an apprehensive glance at the baron, "I must speak with you alone a moment. Do not refuse, I implore you."

"Mademoiselle, I never refuse a lady."

He turned to Etioles with stern politeness.

"Monsieur Le Normand will do me the favor to lead his men back fifty paces, till the answer comes to monsieur. I depend on monsieur's honor for this."

Etioles shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. There is, nevertheless, no reason. I know that lady, who is my sister."

"Indeed?" said Carroll, with a look of singular meaning. "Then it seems that I have had the honor of meeting you before. I thought that I knew the face and figure of that page of yours. Well, then, monsieur, this lady wishes to speak to me, without, at the same time, wishing her brother to hear. Will you retire?"

Carroll eyed the other with a peculiar intensity of glare, in spite of the smile that he assumed. Indeed, the very smile bore a strong resemblance to the expression of a cat standing over a mouse. It was horribly suggestive of fangs and claws held in abeyance.

Etioles was no coward, but his glance sunk before the stern regard of the gigantic Irishman. He turned away without speaking, and led his men back, as he was requested.

As soon as they were out of earshot, the masked lady turned to Carroll.

"You are his comrade, are you not?" she asked, tremulously.

"I am Count Desmond's lieutenant, mademoiselle."

"And you love him, you would lay down your life to save him?" she went on, with great earnestness.

"Indeed I would, then, mademoiselle."

"Oh, sir, I thought I knew your face," she said.

"See, you must know me again."

She unmasked the features of Therese Le Normand, and Carroll bent to his saddle-bow.

"I shall never forget you, mademoiselle."

"Monsieur, will you let me go alone to see Count Desmond?"

"Mademoiselle, it is against my orders. No one must pass here."

"Monsieur, I bring him intelligence of a horrible plot to destroy him. Will you not let me go to see him and warn him?"

"I can not, mademoiselle."

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" she moaned, "what shall I do then?"

"Tell me, mademoiselle, if you can trust me."

"Alas, I can trust no one, sir."

Carroll shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"I can not tell all—and yet—I must save him—monsieur, will you warn the count to keep Etioles by him at all times, never to let him out of his sight, and on no account to order him away?"

Carroll stared.

"Do you mean that for a message, mademoiselle?"

"I do. It is a solemn warning. I can not say more; but I implore him to heed that warning. Do not allow the Baron d'Etioles to separate from the count, for one instant, as you value his life."

"Whose life?"

"The count's, Gerald Desmond's."

"My faith, mademoiselle, it's lucky you spoke," said Carroll, with a grimace; "for in ten minutes later monsieur le baron would have been food for the fishes in Doigny Pond, had you not come up when you did to stop the affair."

Therese turned deadly pale.

"Swear to me you will not harm him," she cried, vehemently. "You do not know what depends on his life now. That of every soul here, your own, and most of all, Gerald's."

Carroll puckered up his lips in a silent whistle and waited for more.

"D'Etioles is my brother," continued Therese, earnestly. "I must not, will not be the means of assisting his crimes, neither will I see him killed. Do you understand me? Promise me you will not harm him, or I shall hate you forever."

Carroll cast a doubtful glance at the distant form of the baron, who sat on his horse like a statue, watching him. At the moment he felt that he longed to go after him.

Therese perceived his irresolution, and changed her tone to one of pleading entreaty, making the best possible use of her dark, lustrous eyes.

"Oh, monsieur," she said, "if you have any pity for an unfortunate lady who is afflicted with a bad brother, grant my prayer. You have quarreled, and were about to fight my brother. Be merciful to me, and spare his life for my sake. You are so strong and brave. I have seen you once before beat him down like a child. 'Twould be no glory to you to kill him. Spare him, and I will love you for it, indeed I will."

The big Irishman was completely melted. The tears stood in his eyes, and he said, in broken accents:

"Oh, mademoiselle, I'll die for ye. By the holy cross! I'll let your brother do anything he likes, and I'll never lay a finger on him!"

Therese held out her hand, which he rapturously kissed.

"You are a gallant gentleman," she said, "and I love you for that."

Carroll hardly knew which end he was standing on for the delight which her words afforded.

"And now, monsieur," she said, hurriedly, "remember what I say. Warn the count to keep Baron d'Etioles close to him at all hazards. The moment they are apart is a moment of danger. Tell him I say so, and farewell."

Then, before Carroll could realize the full sense of her words, she was off down the road like a shot, galloped past the column of horse without deigning a glance that way, and disappeared.

The echo of her horse-hoofs had not entirely ceased, when Gerald Desmond, with Le Borgne and the page, came dashing up from the mill.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SOLDIER'S JOB.

The first question asked by the young captain was:

"Where's Baron d'Etioles?"

"Yonder with his troop," said Carroll, quietly. "He's a mighty quare way with him, but he didn't pass me, ye know."

"Why, Jack," said Gerald, smiling with an expression of slight vexation, "he's brought orders from the marshal to report to me. He'll be second in command now, and the reinforcement is very timely. I hope you've not been rude to him."

"Faith, I hardly know," said the lieutenant, dryly; "we had some words, and I believe we'd have come to cowl steel, av that purty Mademoiselle Therese hadn't been here to stop us."

"Mademoiselle Le Normand here!" exclaimed Gerald, impatiently. "This is no place for a lady. She ought to consider her position."

Carroll looked at his friend, with a very peculiar expression.

"D'ye think so? And sure, she came to see ye."

"She ought not to do it," said Gerald in a vexed tone. "What will those rough soldiers say about it? It's not—"

"Hold!" said Carroll, sternly, with a manner of unusual dignity for him; "the lady is an angel, Gerald Desmond, and if she exposes herself in her innocence, it is for your sake. She came to warn ye of danger."

"Of danger?" said Gerald, carelessly. "It is war-time, and we must expect it."

Carroll sighed deeply.

"Ah, Gerald, ye don't know the luck ye have. Poor old Jack, with his ugly face, would give half a lifetime for what ye throw away. Let it pass. I'll say no more, since ye take it that way."

Gerald turned, with sudden compunction.

"Dear old fellow, I didn't mean to wound you. Tell me, please, what did she say to you?"

"She told you, whatever you do, not to let d'Etioles out of your sight; that your life, and those of all here, depend on your keeping together."

"Well, well, what of that? What do these young girls know of war?"

"Gerald," said Carroll solemnly, "I've given ye the warning, and I'll stake my salvation on the lady's truth. If ye disregard it, my own conscience is quiet. I've done."

In spite of himself, Gerald was struck with his comrade's tone. He felt somewhat irritable, having just been awakened out of a short sleep, by the marshal's orders, but his mind was regaining its balance.

"Well, well," he said, "I will obey it, though it puts me to some trouble. I intended to send him on a

patrol toward the English lines, while I took a sleep. We've men enough now. As it is, I must go with him."

Carroll made no answer, and Gerald rode forward to greet Etioles.

"Monsieur le Baron," he said, courteously, "I regret you should have been detained so long by my lieutenant, but Carroll is a strict disciplinarian, and my orders were very explicit to allow no one past this post."

"It is understood," said Etioles, politely, as they advanced toward Carroll. "I only regret that Monsieur Carroll should have thought necessary to force a quarrel on me about the matter."

"How, a quarrel?"

"Yes, count, a causeless one. You Irish gentlemen have strange ways with you, it must be allowed."

"How is this, Jack?" said Gerald, sharply, to his friend. "Monsieur tells me you have quarreled with him. Is this right among comrades?"

Carroll blushed scarlet. For a moment he seemed to be choking with anger. The next he spoke, with a strange mixture of humility and dignity.

"I have a duty to perform to monsieur," he said, "which you need not make harder, Gerald."

Then turning to Etioles, he removed his hat.

"Monsieur le baron, I behaved with unnecessary rudeness to you. The lady, your sister, has persuaded me of my error. I ask your pardon for my words."

Etioles curled his black mustache with an air of insolence.

"So," he said, with a sneer, "you have thought better of it."

Carroll grew white to the lips, and his eye glared. Then he quietly said:

"Monsieur has reason. I have thought better of it."

There was a curious air of iron self-control apparent in his face, as the stern cuirassier voluntarily humiliated himself, for the second time, before an adversary he already despised.

Etioles smiled with an air of almost Satanic triumph.

"Well," he said, slowly and deliberately, "I accept your apology, *since you have thought better of it*. Come, count, shall we go?"

Gerald gazed with wonder at his friend's unusual behavior. Then he turned away, and rode off with Etioles, in deep thought.

Carroll uttered a deep curse of uncontrollable fury as he saw them disappear round the corner. Then he rode away himself like a madman, till he was out of sight of his men, in the winding road to Tournay, where he stopped and raised his gauntleted hands to heaven.

"Now by the holy cross I adore," said the trooper, in a deep tone of fierce resolve, "I swear that, when this task is over, I'll tear that man limb from limb for that sneer. Oh, lady, lady, ye don't know what ye've done. Ye've disgraced Jack Carroll to a coward."

And the iron cuirassier burst into a storm of sobs, alone in the wood.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONQUERED BY SLEEP.

GERALD DESMOND and the Baron d'Etioles, at the head of a small troop of carabiniers and dragoons, rode slowly away from the powder-mill on the east side, along the crest of a slope, toward the English forces.

The afternoon was warm and bright, and a soft blue haze hung over every thing, rounding off the sharper outlines of the prospect, and covering it with a mantle of azure that beautified the most rugged of objects.

Behind the powder-mill, as we have noticed, the country fell away to a lower level. The Pond of Doigny, at first a mere spring, the origin of a little stream, has been enlarged to its present dimensions by an artificial embankment, in times long past, and what had once been a flour-mill had been changed to its terrible uses, on account of the lonely nature of its position.

For several miles the habitations were few and far between, and the glittering lines of distant canals, bordered with wind-mills, announced that the dead level of the Low Countries had been reached. The Pond of Doigny was at the edge of the encircling ridge.

"There are the English," said Etioles, pointing to a distant field of white tents just visible from the ridge. "We don't need to go any further to see them, count."

Gerald pointed to a belt of forest that interrupted the view of a portion of the country below.

"It will be necessary to examine that wood," he said. "There is no telling how far they may push their cavalry."

"Is it worth while to go down there in force?" asked Etioles, carelessly. "If you wish, I will take a few troopers and gallop through myself. You look haggard and fatigued, my friend. No wonder, after so long a loss of sleep. Why should you not leave this task to me as your second in command, while you stay with the main body?"

Gerald hesitated. The baron's tone was very kind and sympathetic. He seemed to have entirely overcome his dislike to Gerald, and the latter felt much better disposed toward him. Gerald had been without sleep for a period of nearly thirty-six hours, and the hurried rest he had snatched while Carroll took the watch had only lasted half an hour.

"I hardly like to send you thither, baron," he said. "I am not used to letting others go into danger which I do not share; but I own I am nearly asleep as it is."

"Then why not return?" persisted the baron. "Pardon me for saying it, but you can be of no service to his majesty, as it is."

"Well, well," said Gerald, drowsily, "go along, and come back quick. After all, it is only a form. There are no English near us. I will stay here and watch for you."

The baron waved his hand in farewell, and calling a couple of troopers, galloped off down the slope toward the wood. Gerald remained in his saddle, watching him as he went, and saw him disappear in the wood.

Then, as he sat there, an unconquerable feeling of drowsiness overcame him, and he began to nod on his horse. Only those who have experienced the

feeling of soldiers, who for days and nights have been on the march without rest, can understand this drowsiness. It is not a common sleepy feeling, which can be dissipated by cold water or rising and walking about. It is absolutely unconquerable, and both horse and rider share it. Moving along in the plodding column, both will maintain the forward movement, with drooping head, and eyes opening at intervals. Sometimes a branch sweeps the rider's hat off, and he rides on quite unconscious of his loss, while his horse, left without guidance of rein, by a sort of instinct sways off into a fence-corner, and for several minutes both sleep soundly, waking with a start to find strange faces near, as the column has passed the sleepers.

In this state of somnambulism was poor Gerald, for he of all his party had had no sleep. Even his horse was fresher than himself.

As he sat there, his head fell on his breast, and he fell forward, waking with a start to find himself half off his horse, clutching at the mane. For a few moments he sat bolt upright, staring down at the wood below, with a confused sense of something wrong. Then his eyes grew dim and closed, and he fell back.

This time he did not fall far. Le Borgne, the grim scarred sergeant, was close behind him, and the young leader fell on his shoulder, and was fast asleep.

Le Borgne moved up close to Gerald, and supported him patiently in his arms.

"Poor young gentleman!" he said, softly; "he is overcome with sleep. Why should we not lay him down here? He will be good for nothing till he has had his rest."

Two of the soldiers dismounted and received Gerald in their arms, as if he had been a child. The exhausted officer did not even wake for a moment, as they laid him on a mossy bank at the foot of a tree. He only turned slightly on his side, and slumbered deeper than ever.

There was a singular light in Le Borgne's eyes, as he surveyed the quiet and recumbent figure of his leader.

"Come away," he said, in a low tone, "lest we disturb the captain. Those horses make too much noise. Let us retire to a little distance, so as not to wake him."

As Le Borgne was a sergeant, every one yielded him obedience, and the party withdrew from the immediate vicinity of the tree, moved down the hill a short distance, and instantly dismounted.

Then they began to speculate on the probabilities of the baron's finding any enemies in the wood below. At intervals they could see the white road that wound here and there among the black pine trees, and they could trace the course of the baron and his followers by the cloud of dust that rose over the tops of the low trees.

"It's very dry weather," remarked one man. "How long is it since we have had any rain, Jacques?"

"You should know as well as I," retorts the carabineer addressed. "We came here with the count together. The men in the camp say there has been a drought for six weeks."

"I should think so," says the deep voice of Le Borgne. "Look how the dust hangs in the air. Why, comrades, I remember a few days ago, when our regiment went on a reconnaissance, we came in at sunset, and I was sent at midnight to post pickets on the same road. I swear to you, gentlemen, the dust hung in the air yet, like a cloud between us and the moon. And we have but little dew in this fir-wood country."

"How a fire would spread now," remarks one of the men, as he stamps out a match, which he has dropped after lighting his pipe.

"It's lucky the captain's asleep," said Le Borgne, significantly. "He'd put your pipe out for you, comrade. Don't you know it's against the rules, so near a powder magazine?"

"Ah, bah, where is the danger?" says the carabineer, lightly. "We're at least a hundred feet from the mill, and there's no wind. Besides, we will be careful to stamp out any fire."

Le Borgne makes no answer. He is watching the wood.

"Tell me," he says presently, pointing, "you who have good eyes, is not that dust moving?"

Instantly several men are on their feet watching. The white line over the tree-tops, that marks the progress of Etioles, is matched by another, more distant, but much larger, that is swiftly coming to meet the first.

"An English scouting-party," says one. "Now if the captain were awake we might go to meet the rosbifs, and give them a welcome to France."

"The count ought to be waked," said another. "I never saw an officer as good and brave as he. We learned to adore him on the march to Tournay."

Le Borgne sneers. "He's young yet, comrades. I fought at Malplaquet before he was born. Why not go down and help the baron, without troubling the captain? After all we can beat those English before he wakes."

"He would never forgive us, sergeant," says a carabineer.

"Bah," says Le Borgne; "you carabineers are not much, after all. We of Picardy never trouble our officers in little matters of this sort. What harm is it? Besides, the baron is one of your regiment, and he's running into danger. It's our duty to help him. You may stay if you like. I'm going down to fight the English."

He goes to his horse, and unties him from the tree, while he prepares to mount. There was a movement among the carabineers.

"After all," said one, "we can get back before he wakes. I'm off with the sergeant. The honor of the regiment is at stake."

This decided the point.

First one and then the other mounted his horse, and went off after the one-eyed sergeant, who was walking his horse down the hill with great deliberation. At last there was but a single man left, who seemed loth to abandon his commander.

He looked impatiently up and down, watching the wood. He saw two clouds of dust growing nearer together, and marked the sergeant's party deploy as skirmishers, and enter the wood on each side of the road at a slow pace.

"Sacristi!" he muttered, "twill be a splendid ambush if the cursed English pursue the baron.

Parbleu, there they begin, *cric, crac!* Ventre Saint Gris! I can stand it no longer.

He climbed on his horse and tore away full speed, just as he heard the deep, hollow echoes of distant shots, redoubled by the repeating effect of the over-arching woods.

Gerald Desmond lay still, overcome with heavy slumbers, deserted by all his followers, within two hundred yards of a mill holding many tons of powder, with the enemy approaching.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WOMAN ON GUARD.

WHEN Therese Le Normand passed the column of carabineers headed by her brother, she did not deign a glance in their direction. Circumstances had so much estranged her from her brother, this poor young girl in the midst of a corrupt court, like a lily blooming among a heap of garbage, that she rarely spoke to him. Moreover, her head was full of a plan which required her undivided attention.

She cantered along the road toward the chateau for about a mile, then reined in her horse and sat considering in deep thought. She was alone in the wood.

Presently she drew from her bosom a letter which she read over with deep attention. It was written in a delicate, clerical hand, with many feminine peculiarities, but still there were certain turns of expression in the letter which denoted the writer to be a man. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR PUPIL—Our young protegee, the Count of Desmond, is in great danger, and I write to thee to warn him against it. It seems that his majesty has recently been pleased to pardon a certain robber and murderer, named Jean Bonard, surnamed Le Borgne, with several of his comrades, who were already in the galleys, on very curious conditions, namely—that they should be sent to the frontier on secret service of a desperate nature. Thou knowest how his majesty has behaved of late, and how thou and I have often quarreled as to the advisability of a certain measure. Thou knowest that thine old preceptor adores virtue in the abstract, while circumstances have prevented his following it in the concrete. The Jesuits—whom I hate, in passing—hold that the end justifies the means, and if madame is willing to make a certain sacrifice for the good of humanity, it is her affair. Still, this must not interfere with our little Irishman. I have a money interest in him now which I cannot afford to lose. I have found out that the secret service these men are on will put them under our friend's command, and likewise that Monsieur le Baron has applied for leave to go with them. Further, I found that the pardon for these men passed through the hands of Monsieur le Baron himself. In fine, I am penetrated with apprehension that my ten thousand francs will go to the devil if I don't take measures to prevent it.

"Being on the spot, I leave it to thy woman's wit to find out what the real meaning of all this is. In fine, I only see one means of safety for my investment. Let him keep close to Etioles, and do thou watch both. He will not dare to harm him when thou art near, for at present the cards are not dealt for the grand stake. Antoinette has sworn to me that if Desmond dies, she will never perform her part. Well, it causes me laughter to see what fools women will be for love. Thou art worse than she. Still, as a philosopher, I study you both. Keep counsel and watch.

"Thine philosophically, AROUET DE V."

"Strange mixture," muttered the girl, absently crumbling the letter. "It was well I bethought me to enlist your avarice for his protection. How hard is it that I, the only one who loves him for himself, should be shut out from his heart because she saw him first."

She folded away the letter and put it in her breast. "Let me see," she soliloquized, "to-morrow the king will reach Douay, and they must do all their mischief before his arrival. To-day is the day of danger. Will he obey my warning? It is not enough. I must see him myself. I will!"

She set her white teeth together with an expression of fixed resolve, and turned her horse into the wood.

"After all," she murmured, "there are many roads to Rome. If they will not let me pass the pickets, I must slip through the wood."

A few minutes later she was in the midst of the low-spreading fir-trees, riding steadily on away from the road, in a wide circuit. The ground was covered with a soft carpet of fir-spines, into which the feet of her light Arab mare sunk with but little noise, and the dark branches of the firs and spruces bent aside to give her passage. In a wood of evergreen, where the trees decrease upward to a point, the view below is always limited, and Therese rode quietly along, not seeing any thing herself and unseen by others.

Every now and then she paused and listened for voices, but the wood was silent and she heard nothing. Then she rode boldly on, guessing her direction from the sun, till she thought she must be opposite to the camp.

At last she turned her horse, and rode straight toward the lake or pond. She soon found that she was right, for the sharp neigh of a horse greeted her from ahead. Instantly her own mare began to neigh in answer, and Therese trembled with fear lest she should be discovered. Instinctively she leaned over to grasp the nostrils of her mount, but the mare refused to be silent, and neighed louder than ever, rushing forward through the bushes toward the other horse.

As a last resort, the girl pulled her up with all her strength, and rode away in the opposite direction, as fast as whip and spur could urge the pampered animal.

Several other horses took up the neighing, and it was not till fully a minute of rapid galloping that she lost hearing of it.

Then she turned her horse once more, and rode on again toward the place where she fancied she would find traces of Gerald. The proximity of the camp frightened her immeasurably, when she reflected on her sex and youth, and her unprotected position.

The further she advanced, the more cautious she became, until at last the light broke through the

trees, and she perceived that she was coming to the open country.

Soon after she emerged on the side of the ridge of Doigny, and saw before her the forests and lowlands of Flanders, while far to her right the little rill of Doigny fell down the side of the slope.

Before her, in the forest, she distinguished the clouds of dust that told of the approach of the rival scouting parties, and just as she reached the ridge she heard the faint, distant reports of fire-arms, sharp and frequent.

Then suddenly a horseman dashed down the hill at full speed by the side of the little rill of Doigny, and galloped into the forest, where the dust rose furiously now, and where the report of fire-arms became quite frequent, and nearer momentarily.

Therese listened attentively. Young as she was and unused to these sounds, it needed no one to interpret their significance. Fighting was going on in the forest, and the scattering shots grew nearer and nearer. The French must be getting the worst of it, evidently, and running away, from the rapid manner in which a trail of dust rose over the tree-tops, coming nearer and nearer the edge of the forest.

And then of a sudden came a rattling volley, accompanied by a shout, and the dust rose up in a cloud and hung stationary, while the shots rattled incessantly.

Again the girl understood all. It was a check from some unknown party. Therese sat on her horse and watched the dust below. White smoke began to mingle with it now. She wrung her hands in agony. What was going on, and who was there? She could not tell. All she knew was that she was powerless to help the man she loved, and that some fearful danger impended over him.

Hardly knowing what she did, she advanced slowly along the edge of the ridge, in the vague hope that from some point she might gain a nearer view, perhaps even see the figures of some of the combatants.

On and on she went, step by step, till she had passed the little rill, her eyes still riveted on the contest below. Then on a sudden the deep neigh of a horse close by startled her.

She looked around and beheld a powerful dapple-gray horse who seemed to be regarding her with eyes of fire, as he struggled at the halter-chain which confined him to a tree, and neighed in thunder tones. The horse was caparisoned in the housings of an officer, and a little way off, lay a cavalier, with breast-plate and laced coat, all the fine uniform of captain of carabineers, while he was fast asleep.

Therese uttered a cry of joy.

"Gerald!" It was indeed Gerald, safe out of all battles, and asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

LIEUTENANT JOHN CARROLL rode slowly back to his picket-guard, and soon after, leaving it in charge of one of the corporals of carabineers who had been left by the baron, the Irish cuirassier took his way slowly and thoughtfully back along the shore of the pond toward the powder-mill.

Carroll, like Therese, had been revolving a plan in his mind, since his suspicions had been aroused.

The lady's warning not to let Etioles separate from Desmond was ever ringing in his ears, and he said to himself:

"Maybe I'm right and maybe I'm not, but I'm thinkin' that an independent patrol by a Carroll of Bally Carroll would be mighty convenient, just now, to make things sure."

He soon arrived at the camp which he found almost empty.

The hangdog-looking sentry, one of Le Borgne's pleasant comrades, told him, in answer to his inquiry, that the captain had taken all the new men out on patrol toward Brussels, leaving the old men in camp.

"And where are the old men, as ye call them?"

"Over yonder in the woods, lieutenant, asleep."

Carroll looked in the direction indicated, and sure enough there were eight or ten men, apparently asleep.

"I thought Gerald would be sorry for letting the drunken brute off so easy," said the Irishman, suspiciously. "I'll go bail they're drunk again, though where they got the stuff bates me."

It should be remarked that Desmond, considering his small force and the risk he ran in retaining a part as prisoners, had dealt leniently with the drunkards of the night before, returning them to duty on abject promises of good behavior.

From their aspect Carroll strongly suspected that they had got drunk once more. Accordingly, he rode over to them, and drawing his long rapier, commenced poking them up with the sharp point.

He was satisfied from the surly glances and muttered oaths, as well as from the staggering way in which they walked, that he was correct. Then he blazed out in a torrent of indignation, and asked them what they meant by daring to repeat an offense for which they had once been forgiven.

"Ah, well, lieutenant," said one fellow, drunk enough to be insolent, "we don't belong to your regiment, anyway."

"No, no," chorused the rest, encouraged by this, "we're French soldiers, and want no Irish here."

"Then, by the holy cross, I'll make ye wish ye'd not met an Irishman this day," said Carroll, grimly.

"Come out here, every man of ye!"

A laugh of derision greeted him, which was changed to curses and cries of fear, as the cuirassier rode furiously at them, slashing right and left with his long blade.

"Ha! ye mutinous devils!" he shouted, at every stroke, "ye won't obey an Irishman, won't ye? Take that, and that!"

In two minutes he had driven them from the wood into camp, for they had been lying around totally unarmed, and moreover, the sword of a man in authority is hard to resist.

Cowed, but sullen, the men of Picardy at last fell in as he ordered them. But to all his questions as to where they got their liquor, he could get no answer, and at last one of the men blurted out:

"It's no use, lieutenant; you and the captain won't know till it's too late. We're paid for what we're doing by better than you or him."

The man's comrades all set up a warning growl at

this, but he, who was the drunkest of the party, persisted:

"I don't care a curse who knows it. I didn't pull an oar for nothing, lieutenant. We're to blow—"

And then, to Carroll's surprise, all his comrades fell upon him, knocked him down, and struck and kicked him into instant insensibility with their heavy boots, regardless of his presence.

This done, they fell into ranks again with more docility than before, and the ringleader of the first mutiny touched his hat with sudden respect.

"Don't mind him, lieutenant," he said, "he's drunk, and a fool besides. We're sober now, sir."

Carroll looked at the steady line with amazement. They hardly seemed like the same soldiers.

"Each man go and get his horse ready," he ordered. "I'll give you fellows something to do to keep you from getting drunk. Where's Sergeant Pichot, that was drunk last night?"

"Here, lieutenant."

"Get the men and horses ready. Be under arms and standing to horse, facing the pond, when I come back. Do you understand?"

"Yes, lieutenant."

Carroll turned his horse and rode slowly toward the powder-mill. It was his intention to test their behavior by a pretended absence, and to come back and lead them off on some troublesome service.

When he reached the front of the mill, however, he felt something which seemed to beckon him forward to examine the vicinity.

"After all," muttered he, "these drunken devils have been here, ever since the patrol went away, and there's no tellin' what mischief they mayn't be up to. I'll take a circuit."

He slowly rode all around the mill.

He had not done this yet.

In front Carroll found nothing but the open esplanade and the two store-tents. The door of one of these, left half open, suggested the place whence the mutineers had procured their superfluous courage.

"By Saint Patrick!" muttered Carroll, "it's clear the boy didn't spoil all the punch, more power to him. What's on this side?"

On the right was the mill-race, and he could see the great water-wheel, with its dripping buckets, at the extreme rear.

He rode round to the left side to take observations, and found that the wood extended nearly up to the wall of the shed. The ground was as dry as tinder and thickly carpeted with the dry spines of the fir-trees. He rode along to the rear and then suddenly pulled up with a startled exclamation.

"Mother o' God, I see it all! Oh, heavenly Father, what blackguards! We're in a trap, so we are."

The cause of his alarm was very simple, and sufficiently awful to a soldier.

A large hole had been cut in the side of the building, a heap of black powder half filled it, and a broad, black train of powder led away from the walls into the woods to the left. Where it ended he could not see, but one thing was plain.

A man at the other end of that train might blow them all into the air with a spark.

Carroll trembled from head to foot, and the sweat poured down his face. And as he gazed, spell-bound, he heard the rattle of musketry in the open country beyond.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DIRE DEED.

Down in the forest of Doigny, around the Brussels road, a smart skirmish was taking place.

Etiolles, with a couple of troopers, galloping recklessly along, had come on a whole squadron of Austrian cuirassiers, with a troop of English dragoons in support. He had seen nothing, till a turn of the road brought him plump on their advance, a party of ten cuirassiers, with black breastplates, and brass helmets with bear-skin crests.

As we have said, Etiolles was no coward, and in this instance he did just what he ought to have done.

In a moment his pistol was leveled, and he and his troopers fired at the cuirassiers, tumbling one out of his saddle. Then wheeling about, they turned back, and galloped for dear life.

The suddenness and promptness of their attack disconcerted the enemy, and its audacity made them suspicious that a force was behind the French patrol. Thus, when Etiolles and his followers turned the corner and disappeared, they gained fully a minute before the allied column resumed its march. A minute, to a galloping horse, means a quarter of a mile, and the French had left at least that gap behind them, when the enemy discovered the trick, and opened a harmless fire as they galloped in pursuit.

Down the dusty road thundered French and Austrians, the relative distance gradually lessening, for the Austrians were splendidly mounted. Etiolles, knowing that he was retreating on his friends, did not urge his horse, as he might have done, and thus it happened that the cuirassiers were only three hundred yards behind, at the edge of the forest.

It was then that Le Borgne and his men, who had been hidden in the wood biding their time, poured a close and deadly volley into the advance of the enemy, that threw them into instant confusion, while the sergeant, profiting by the shock, and charging, sent the whole of the column whirling up the road in a sudden panic.

These reverses of fortune are frequent in cavalry affairs, and do not always imply a want of courage on either side. As soon as the allies found that there was no serious pursuit, they threw out a long line of skirmishers, and pushed boldly through the woods, firing their pistols, while the English dragoons made the echoes ring with their carbine-shots.

Etiolles pulled up, as soon as the first volley sounded, and warmly praised his men, in the momentary lull that followed.

Then he rode up to Le Borgne, and said something to him in a low tone.

"Fast asleep under a tree by the mill," answered the one-eyed sergeant, grimly.

"Good," said the baron, with a diabolical smile of triumph. "It is time to do your part, then. The signal will be, when you see them round the mill."

"It is understood," said Le Borgne, in a low tone, but turning very pale. "It is not our fault if he is asleep."

"Away quickly," said Etiolles, his own face as pale as the other's, but speaking through his clinched

teeth. "Give us enough time, remember. Here they come. I will manage the rest."

The sergeant touched his hat, wheeled his horse, and galloped off, as if he were striving to win a race.

He took a direction far to the left of the powder-mill, and as he went he loaded his pistol.

Just then the enemy opened a dropping fire, and began to advance slowly through the wood, cautiously feeling their way, dreading surprises. The French, scattered at very wide intervals, so as to interpose a long line, returned the fire.

In reconnoitering expeditions of this kind, the amount of force on either side is generally unknown, and the element of mystery largely adds to the excitement. The allies, fancying a regiment in front of them, were daunted and detained by the fire of twenty men. For fully a quarter of an hour Etiolles held them in check; and then, just as the superior weight of the enemy's fire was beginning to tell, and the carabineers were retreating to the edge of the wood, a sudden rattling volley on the left of the enemy surprised friend and foe alike.

Then Etiolles heard a loud, ringing yell, followed by the crashing of dry sticks; and Jack Carroll, followed by the desperate ruffians of the dragoons of Picardy, came sweeping down the allied line, rolling them up in confusion, and sending them reeling back a second time.

But Carroll's reinforcement was too small to be of much avail. The enraged cuirassiers, at length perceiving its insignificance, and burning for revenge, came down again, fiercer than before.

Then it was that Etiolles, with a sudden change of demeanor, abandoned the fight.

"*Sauve qui peut!*" he shouted, at the top of his voice, turning his horse. "Save yourselves. Follow me!"

The craven cry from a commanding officer will determine the issue in many a fight. In this instance its effect was immediate. Without an exception, the carabineers turned and fled, and the ruffian dragoons followed, with singular unanimity.

Carroll, who was even then flushed with his triumph, and shouting out encouragement to his men, while he fired his pistol at the enemy, was warned, by the sudden silence in his rear, that something had happened. He looked round and found himself alone in the wood, with the Austrians and English trotting forward and firing at him. The bullets whistled round him, and he felt that he was a mark for a hundred enemies, while his comrades had deserted him!

He had brought down his reinforcement from camp, expecting to find his friend Gerald in danger, and he had seen not a glimpse of the young captain. Even in the imminence of his present danger, a deep conviction of treachery came over him. He remembered the train, which he had no time to trace, the powder-mill, Etiolles's sudden flight, and the stout cuirassier groaned aloud in his agony.

"Gerald, my boy, my boy, ye're doomed. It's a cursed trick."

Then, as a sudden thought struck him, he shouted out:

"No, by the holy cross, he shall not die."

The enemy came closer, the bullets rattled about him, one cut his sleeve, another passed through his hat; still he seemed to be heedless of danger.

A big cuirassier rode at him with drawn sword, shouting:

"Surrender!"

The next moment Carroll fired his remaining pistol in the man's face, turned his horse, and tore away in the direction taken by Le Borgne, followed by a rain of bullets.

"There's a man to fire the train," was the thought that flashed through his mind. "If I can cut him off, Gerald may be saved."

The wood was safely passed, and he tore his horse's sides with his spurs, as he strained up the ascent to the ridge of Doigny.

"Mother of God! I'm right!" muttered the cuirassier, as he leaned over his saddle-bow at full speed.

"There's the track."

Sure enough, in the sandy soil before him, were the tracks of a horse at full speed, fresh and recent.

Carroll followed them like a sleuth-hound. He heard the shots and shouts dying away behind him. Then came a volley and a shout from the left, and he looked hurriedly up.

There, on the edge of the ridge, close to the powder-mill, the French horsemen were clustered, firing at the English and cheering defiantly.

He looked back, and but a single soldier was following him. The rest were coming out of the woods in a close mob, charging up-hill at the French. He heard a bugle-note on the ridge, and in a moment every horseman had vanished, while their shouts could be heard dying away in the distance.

The English and Austrians pressed on with louder shouts than ever.

"God have mercy on your souls," said Carroll, hurriedly, as he galloped on. He had taken in the whole scene at a glance.

A moment later he had reached the wood, and caught sight of what he had been expecting.

Le Borgne, erect on his horse, with a carbine held like a pistol, pointing downward, in his right hand, sat still as a statue, near the edge of the ridge, from whence he could command a full view of the bank by the powder-mill and the crowd of enemies.

"Hold!" shouted Carroll, wildly, as he rushed at the sergeant. "Where is Count Desmond?"

Le Borgne started and turned round at the voice. The start gave Carroll time to reach him, and he demanded:

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to fire the train," said the sergeant, grimly. "See the English dogs all round the mill."

He leaned over and pointed the muzzle of the carbine into a broad, shallow heap of black powder as he spoke.

"But tell me, in God's name," cried the Irish officer, seizing his shoulder, "where is Count Desmond?"

Le Borgne, with a sudden effort, flinched away from the other's grasp. Then he looked at Carroll with the expression of a demon.

"Asleep by the mill," he said, and he laughed!

"**Sauve qui peut!*" literally, Save himself who can. "Every man for himself," is the English equivalent in times of desperate peril, when nothing else can be done.

There was a sudden report, and a bright, broad flash, up from the ground. Both horses, scorched and terrified, reared wildly and sprang backward. The bright flash ran on through the woods with amazing velocity, like a broad ribbon of flame. Carroll, as his horse came over backward, caught a glimpse of the black mill, with a crowd of soldiers round it. Then the animal fell back on him, crushing him, and a broad white sheet of flame shot up, filling the whole atmosphere with fire; trees were torn up and sent sailing through the sky, and the air was full of black fragments, shooting outward from a common center.

A fearful crash, as if heaven and earth were rent asunder, followed close on the flash, and Carroll fell back, stunned and senseless.

The powder-mill had blown up.

CHAPTER XXI.

LOOKING OVER THE DEAD.

On the same afternoon when these events occurred, a numerous train of horsemen was approaching the Chateau Dillon from Tournay. At the head of this train were two officers, both old, both wearing the uniform of marshals, but of very different appearance. There was no mistaking the erect figure and keen, hawklike profile of old Cormontaigne, as alert and active at sixty as a man of thirty, sitting in his saddle as if he had grown there. His companion was of a very different appearance, and worth more than passing notice.

Had he been standing erect, he would have measured several inches above six feet, and his frame was cast with the bones of a giant. This colossal frame was, however, distinguished and marred by great corpulency, and was at present half-sitting, half-reclining, on the soft cushions of an open litter, hung between long, springy poles, and carried by two horses, each led by a dragoon.

The face of Marshal Saxe, for it was he, was marked with the deep lines of suffering, and his cheeks hung in flabby folds on either side of the square jaw and resolute mouth of him who had once been noted as the handsomest soldier in Europe. Maurice of Saxe, at the head of the armies of France, and on the eve of the greatest achievement of his life, was a dropsical invalid, unable to mount a horse since leaving Paris, and who had been "tapped," in surgical phrase, only three days before.

Yet, in spite of his suffering and bloated frame, there were still traces in his lion-like face of the beauty about which empresses and queens had quarreled, twenty years before, and for which poor Adrienne* Lecouvreur had wrecked all her happiness. The profile was as perfect as ever, and the fierce blue eye shone with all its old luster, in spite of the mist that crossed it at intervals, when spasms of suffering caused the firm lips to close like a vice over the clenched teeth.

At present he was conversing eagerly with Cormontaigne, and had forgotten his sufferings.

"You say that the youth is the same who was recently promoted?"

"I say nothing of my own knowledge. The name is the same. He was sent to report to me, with a squadron of carabineers, and the orders came, the day previous, to send him to that post, with those wretches."

"Strange," muttered Saxe. "What can the young man have done to merit the king's anger, when he has just promoted him?"

Cormontaigne shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have? His majesty takes strange fancies. Besides, there is a certain person here who seems to take wonderful interest in his fate since the order came."

"Who is that?"

"Le Normand d'Etiolles."

A strong expression of disgust crossed Saxe's face.

"*Tete de cochon!*" he muttered. "That sharper, who goes about trying to force cards on the man that will not play."

"Softly, my friend, softly! The game is not over yet. There are too many interested in its success. The king is expected here to-morrow, and the court comes with him."

"I know it. I wish they would stay at Paris, till we settle the business with these English."

"They will not. His majesty is emulous of the example of his ancestors, Henry IV. and Louis XIV. He wishes to be called Louis the Great. Well, the smiles of beauty are the fitting rewards of valor. His majesty needs a Helen to his Paris. You will see he will get one."

"Let him," said Saxe, impatiently. "What has all this to do with Count Desmond?"

"That is a mystery. Etiolles displays a wonderful interest in him, and yet, my faith, I'd swear he hates him."

"Where is Etiolles now?" demanded the marshal, suddenly.

"At the mill, with Desmond. After I had sent the young fellow off, according to orders, my conscience troubled me. Parbleu, Monsieur le Marechal, I could not find it in my heart to leave him there, with fifteen pardoned galley-slaves, in face of an enemy who might try the effect of a hot shot, just for sport, on the rotten shed. I sent Etiolles to him, with a force sufficient to furnish patrols, and to keep him informed of the vicinity of the enemy."

"What said Etiolles to that?"

"Parbleu, he jumped at the offer."

"And you sent him to help Desmond?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"Simply this. If you wished to kill him, you have taken the right course."

"How?"

Cormontaigne looked disturbed and anxious. The old soldier was as simple as a child, with all his

*Adrienne Lecouvreur, the greatest tragic actress of her day, and a most beautiful woman. The story of her hapless love and self-sacrifice for the then brilliant and successful soldier, Maurice of Saxe, for whose advancement she gave up all that a woman holds dear, is one of the most mournful pages of the history of the age of Louis XV. It has been preserved in the tragedy of "Adrienne Lecouvreur," in which, in our own days, Rachel and Ristori have won some of their greatest triumphs. Matilda Heron and others have essayed the same task in the English translation "Adrienne the Actress."

genius as an engineer. Saxe was a veteran courtier, as well as a General.

"You say you think Etioles is Desmond's enemy?" "I say nothing. I am not certain. He seemed to be. They saluted as if they disliked each other. That's all."

"My infant," said Saxe, with a grim smile, checked by a spasm of pain, "I know thee by heart. And I know more. Etioles is Desmond's enemy, because he believes Desmond—"

Bom! ! ! ! ! !
The marshal started up on his cushions, and every man in the escort jumped half out of his saddle at the tremendous sound, like a clap of thunder bursting over their heads. The ground trembled and rocked as if under an earthquake, the horses shook and snorted with terror, and every one turned pale, as that awful crash told in a moment the fate of the powder-mill.

A huge white column of smoke rose in the air over the trees, at a distance of less than a mile, for they had passed the Chateau Dillon during their conversation, and were approaching the pond of Doigny.

In the midst of the white cloud were numerous black objects, shooting through the air in diverging circles, and even as they looked, great beams, spars, trunks of trees, broken branches, and other objects, came sailing overhead, and crashing down through the trees into the road all round them.

"Ah, bon Dieu! what is that?" cried Cormontaigne, with a groan of unutterable horror, as something crashed down in the sandy road with a heavy thud! and splashed red blood all round it.

Crash! crash! crack! thud!
The horrible shower continued for several seconds, to be succeeded by a stillness, the more awful because of the previous peal and crash.

Then the awe-stricken soldiers, with white faces and compressed lips, looked at the dreadful ruins around them.

Beams and branches were not all that had fallen. The most fearful sight of all was seen in the blackened and bloody fragments of the carcasses of men and horses, blown to a distance of nearly a mile by that tremendous explosion.

For a while no one spoke. Cormontaigne trembled all over.

Maurice of Saxe was the first to regain his composure.

"Move on, Monsieur le Marechal," he said, gravely. "If we are too late to prevent a catastrophe, we may at least save some of the victims, if any are left alive."

Cormontaigne silently, as if by mechanical impulse, raised his hand to his hat in salute, and urged his horse forward. The trembling beast, slowly, and with evident apprehension, began to move on, step by step, past the ghastly-looking objects that strewed the way. As for the marshal, he carefully averted his eyes from the spectacle, practiced as he was, for he had a tender heart.

Not so Saxe. Phlegmatic and cool by nature, and somewhat selfish withal, though not obtrusively so, he leaned over from the litter, and carefully inspected the fragments of bodies as he passed.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. "Hein! Cormontaigne, there is not a French body here. They are all in the Austrian uniform, and there's a scarlet coat."

Arrested by the voice of the commander-in-chief, Cormontaigne looked, and was compelled to admit that Saxe was right.

"I see it all," said the senior marshal, with rapid intuition. "Desmond has stationed a man at the end of the train, about which you spoke to me; he has enticed the enemy round the mill, and blown them up."

"But should we not have heard firing?" objected the other.

"No, for whatever firing they did must have been behind the ridge, and lost in the forest toward Brussels. The English are advancing. In a few days they will reach our lines. Then they are ours."

It was curious to note how the details of a terrible tragedy became, to the mental vision of the ambitious Saxe, only the incidents of a great plan. Speculating on the English advance, he seemed to forget all about the slaughter that had just occurred.

The cavalcade moved on, and presently turned the corner of the road, and came in sight of the pond of Doigny.

As they did so, a small troop of horsemen, black as negroes, came slowly forward to meet them at the edge of the pond. From the rider's head to the horse's foot, every man was as black as ink, save for red streaks here and there, that told of recent wounds. The horses were clean shorn of tail and mane, sorry spectacles, staggering as if drunk.

"Who, in God's name, are you?" hastily exclaimed Cormontaigne, as he gazed at the figure of him who seemed the leader.

"The Baron d'Etioles," answered the other, in a husky voice, "with all that is left of the garrison. We did not flee far enough when Le Borgne fired the train, and several were hurt by the wrecks and the flame."

Marshal Saxe interposed, with the stern question: "Where is Count Desmond?"

The baron pointed across the pond.

"The pieces are near Brussels, I think," he said.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RUINS.

JACK CARROLL came to his senses, to find the red glare of sunset shining athwart thin clouds of smoke, that streamed up from the ground all round him, while a scorching pain in his neck caused him to writhe upon his elbow with a groan.

He was lying upon a bed of white ashes, above a scorched and blackened ground, and all round him a low, red line of flame was creeping outward in a circle, for the dry grass was on fire, and the air was suffocating with smoke. Bewildered and stupid, the cuirassier tried to rise, and found that his leg was caught in something which lay on it, heavy and inert. Exerting all his strength in a desperate effort, he wrenched it out, from beneath what he recognized as the carcass of his horse, and staggered to his feet, blinded and suffocated.

His thick coat and boots, the buff gauntlets and heavy uniform wig which he wore, had saved him from serious burns, and a thick pool of blood that

lay by the horse, had still further checked the feeble fire in the scanty wood-grass; but all this he did not recognize.

Only he remembered a terrible explosion, and woke to find himself in the midst of flames, choking and burning to death.

Half-crazed, and frantic with ungovernable terror, he staggered and ran forward, he knew not where, and by good fortune, took the way to the open field, and found himself on the cool, sandy ridge, where there was no grass to feed the fire. Moreover, a cool breeze was coming over the open country, doubtless drawn by the suction of the great explosion and fire. The poor cuirassier opened his parched and burning lips, and breathed in deep draughts of that pure, delicious air, which he had never till then learned to value rightly.

Then he sunk down on the cool sand, and endeavored to collect his thoughts. At first, he could hardly tell where he was, or how he came there; but gradually, as the cool air revived his fainting frame, he recalled the circumstances that preceded the explosion, and wondered how he had escaped. Also he remembered the diabolical laugh with which Le Borgne had said, as he fired the train:

"Asleep by the mill!"

Where was Le Borgne? Where was Gerald? As he ruminated, Carroll's eyes grew dark and ominous. He slowly rose to his feet and stretched his limbs, one after another, feeling every part, to find if he was seriously injured. The examination convinced him that he was quite sound still. Then he smiled.

"Gerald Desmond," he said, raising his clenched hand to heaven, "ye may be dead, my own boy, but if there's a man left, this side of hell, that did ye the treason, I swear by the holy cross I'll send him where he belongs for this day's work, if sword and hand last Jack Carroll."

He looked to his weapons. Defiled and soiled with dust and ashes, as they were, sword and pistol were alike unharmed. Even the cartridges in his pouch had been saved from the fire by their thick leathern casing.

Carroll did not know that, from head to foot, he was as black as soot, with the horrible dust of the burnt powder. If he noticed anything, he did not heed it, so set was he on revenge for Gerald's death. From the first, he had suspected a plot; what, he did not know. Now, he had fathomed its full atrocity in the words of Le Borgne:

"Asleep by the mill!"

Ay, and blown to atoms ere this, doubtless.

"Never mind," he muttered. "First, revenge." Grimly and deliberately he loaded his pistol, and placed it in his belt. He had it still clutched mechanically in his hand, since he fired it at the Austrian cuirassier.

Where was the man who was then following him? He looked round. Not a soul was to be seen on any side. All was still.

Then he strode over the low belt of flames, and entered the wood, seeking for his dead horse.

The fire had burned itself out around the carcass, and a bed of white and gray ashes took its place. Now that he was collected and cool, Carroll could see the cause of his salvation.

His horse, in falling back, had sheltered the rider, and taken the full force of the explosion and fragments, being completely dismembered, with one leg torn off below the knee.

A little way off lay another horse, similarly shattered, but not so badly, and beside it the body of a man.

The Irish cuirassier uttered a savage malediction of disappointed fury as he looked at the body.

"Thoro mon diaoul!" he growled, with clenched teeth, "the hound is dead, and has escaped me."

It was true. The body of Le Borgne, with the whole side of the head beaten in by a heavy beam, which lay on the ground, was stretched cold and dead, covered with black dust and crimson stains, a fearful object.

Carroll turned away. Even the stout cuirassier sickened at the sight. His heart softened, and moreover he was too good a Catholic to retain revenge against one punished in such a manner.

"God has judged ye, Le Borgne," he said. "Ye fired the train yourself. Woe be to ye, if ye miscalculated the distance."

Then he left the wood with slow, heavy steps, and advanced toward the site of the powder-mill, with deliberate caution.

He knew what he had to see there, but he had steeled his nerves to the sight. A few minutes later, it burst on him in all its ghastly completeness, and even he was taken aback.

Where the great, black powder-mill and white tents had been, in the thickets of a dense pine-wood, now was a bare, empty waste; a deep pit, excavated by the action of the powder, a few shattered stumps of trees, sticking up here and there out of the sand, and nothing else. But around this void waste, in a radiating circle of death, was a picture of horrible destruction seldom paralleled.

Trees were not only laid in rows, but splintered in fragments, and stuck fantastically up in spiky pieces, at every conceivable angle. The pond was covered with broken pieces of the wreck, some nearly at the other end.

Worst of all were the horrible sights near by. The ground was covered with the torn and bloody carcasses of men and horses, blackened with powder-dust, and not a single body unscathed. These the cuirassier had expected. He was looking for something else; traces of the horse and rider he knew. At last he found them.

Twined around the stump of a large tree, whose top had been snapped off like a pipe-stem, was Gerald's brass halter-chain. He recognized it in a moment. In the halter was hanging the head and neck of a gray horse. The thick tree had sheltered so much from the explosion, but the body was scattered in horrible fragments all over the hill-side.

The cuirassier turned away in horror, and his eyes fell on something that made him shriek out like a woman.

At the very foot of the stump, covered with blood from the hanging horse's head, lay a black silk mask, that had fallen there, miraculously preserved from the explosion.

With shaking fingers he raised the little mask.

"Oh, Mother of Heaven!" cried poor Carroll.

"'Tis her own little mask that she wore to-day, and

she's been here again to warn him, and they're both in glory together! Ochone! Ochone!"

The echoes from the blackened ruins repeated the sounds.

It was too plain. Gerald and Therese had been shattered to atoms in the explosion, beyond a doubt.

Sick and trembling, the Irish cuirassier cast himself to the earth, face downward.

He was all alone now.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COURT OF INQUIRY.

THE camp before Tournay was all alive with joy. Cannons were pealing in a loud salute, the bands played the old Royalist air, "*Oh, Richard, oh, mon roi*," the whole army was under arms, in long, glittering lines of horse and foot, for the king has arrived in camp, and a grand reception had been prepared.

A train of carriages, driven by servants in brilliant liveries, advanced at a foot-pace along the lines of armed men, surrounded by the brilliant uniforms of the Black Musketeers. A little army in itself, six thousand of the finest heavy cavalry in Europe, every rider six feet in height, the celebrated *Maison du Roi*, or King's Household, followed the Musketeers, in a broad and imposing column.

Marshal Saxe, in a low basket carriage, was awaiting the king, and welcomed his majesty, with respectful regret that his disease had prevented him from coming to meet him.

The dull, ill-tempered face of the king was unusually gracious that day. He was positively kind to the invalid marshal, and enjoined him strictly not to neglect his health.

"On you, Monsieur le Marechal," he said, "now depends the safety of France. You are too precious to be exposed."

It was the longest speech his majesty had made for many a year, for Louis the Well Beloved had a great deal of the oyster in his dull, commonplace soul.

Consequently the marshal felt that the king trusted him implicitly, and his face grew brighter, in spite of his pains.

But all this passed very quickly. The king, who was ever self-indulgent, was tired with his journey from Douay, and retired to his quarters, refusing to hold a review.

That night there was to be a "little supper," and his majesty was reserving himself for it. Business might, and did, wait for pleasure.

About noon, a number of brilliant officers, in full uniform, rode up to a large marquee, not far from Saxe's quarters, and left their horses outside, while they entered in a body. Orderlies were in waiting, and every now and then one issued from the tent, and went dashing away full speed, with a letter in his belt.

"What are they doing in there?" asked a young volunteer of Clare's horse, who had lounged over from his camp, near by. The young man's accent was foreign, his dark face quite handsome, and he looked pale from recent illness. He was speaking to a tall carabineer, off duty, who was also watching the tent with great interest.

"It's the court of inquiry, about the explosion," said the carabineer, looking down at the slender frame of the other with some disdain.

"What explosion?" asked the Irish volunteer, innocently.

"Why, how long have you been in camp?" demanded the carabineer, in a tone of wonder, "not to know that?"

"Half an hour," said Cavanagh, for it was he, simply.

"Ah, for example, that is different. When did you come?"

"In the king's train. I have been in hospital."

"Ah, sick?"

"No, wounded!"

"Indeed?"

The big soldier's tone was more respectful.

"Gunshot wound?"

"No, rapier. A little affair—you understand?"

The carabineer softened instantly.

"My poor comrade, thou art in luck, to get well in time for our next battle. I hear the English are advancing, with a number of Dutch and Austrians. Thou art in luck."

"Thanks. Now tell me about this explosion. What is it?"

"Did you not hear a loud report yesterday, while on the march here?"

"We heard something, but we took it for the siege-guns."

"It was the powder-mill of Doigny. Some of my comrades were there, with two officers of ours. The English drove them in, when they were patrolling, and they blew up the mill and all the English, too. My faith, it was a dear price they paid, though."

"How? Were any of them killed?"

"Several, and all more or less scorched. The senior officer, an Irish count, recently appointed, through some court favor, was drunk, they say, and fast asleep by the mill. Of course he was blown to pieces."

The young volunteer started.

"What was his name?" he eagerly asked.

"Count Desmond. He's no loss, for the other officers had made up their minds to get him out, I understand."

Cavanagh listened intently, and his lip trembled.

"Comrade," he said, simply, "Count Desmond and I were volunteers in the same squadron. Do not belie him when he is dead."

The carabineer flushed slightly. He had all a Frenchman's tact and consideration for others' feelings.

"I beg pardon, comrade," he said, "I did not know that. There was another Irish officer killed there, they tell me; a brave fellow, too, one of your regiment."

Cavanagh turned pale.

"Not Jack Carroll, too?" he said, brokenly. "He was my only other friend."

"I do not know the name," said the soldier.

"This one was a huge man, with an enormous red mustache."

"I feared it," said Cavanagh, with a sigh. "I'm all alone, comrade. It was Jack Carroll you describe."

There was a short silence. Then the young volunteer turned to the other.

"Comrade, you said Count Desmond was drunk. Do you know this of your own self?"

"Certainly, no," said the carabineer, hastily. "It is but report."

"Friend," said Cavanagh, earnestly, "I am but one man against a crowd, but I will venture my life the report is a lie. If you hear it from any one who says he knows it, tell him that Will Cavanagh, of the Third Squadron of Clare's Horse, says that he lies, and will prove it on him with any weapons he pleases."

The big carabineer stared a little, but he said: "I will contradict the report in future, comrade. You knew this Count Desmond well?"

"He and Carroll were my only friends, and I know neither ever failed to do his duty."

Then he parted from the carabineer, and walked away with drooping head. He felt inexpressibly lonely.

"Lieutenant the Baron d'Etiolles, to be examined," said the orderly on duty.

"Monsieur le Baron will be seated," said Marshal Cormontaigne, the president of the court.

Etiolles advanced and took his seat. He was uninjured by the explosion, having been a long way off, but his hair and mustache had been singed and disfigured by the blaze of the burning forest, where the bushes had taken fire from the flying wrecks, and he looked pale from the shock.

The marshal questioned him closely about the skirmish, and his orders to Le Borgne, and his answers were in the main correct.

At last came the question:

"Where was Count Desmond during the fight?"

Etiolles hesitated.

"I had rather not say, Monsieur le Marechal. The count is dead."

"What is your cause for hesitation, monsieur?"

"I do not wish to injure the memory of a deceased officer, who was, moreover, in my own squadron."

"The court appreciates your reluctance, monsieur, but at present we are endeavoring to ascertain the truth. I gave the count certain orders transferred to me. I would ascertain if they were obeyed. I repeat, where was Count Desmond?"

"Asleep under a tree by the mill."

"How—asleep when a fight was in progress?"

"Asleep so soundly that the shots failed to waken him."

"How was this? When did he fall asleep?"

"I do not know, Monsieur le Marechal. I left him watching me as I rode into the forest, and he was unable to sit his horse at the time."

"How—did he seem sick?"

"No, monsieur; only sleepy. On his feet, probably, he would have staggered. As it was, he nearly fell off his horse."

"Monsieur le Baron," said Cormontaigne, gravely, "do you know that you imply something serious?"

"Remember, marshal, I begged to be excused from answering."

"In one word, sir, answer plainly. Do you mean to say that the count was drunk on duty? Yes or no?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Marechal. Almost all of the men we relieved in the camp were also drunk. It was my principal reason for patrolling, for I feared the enemy might come in on us unprepared."

"Did any of your men notice the same thing?"

"I think so, monsieur."

"That will do. You can retire, baron. Call the senior sergeant, if he is alive, who belonged to the party."

Etiolles bowed and retired. He had glutted his revenge. Were his enemy still alive, he knew that he had ruined him as a soldier. Dead, he had caused his name to be dishonored.

Cormontaigne looked gravely round the board.

"Gentlemen, if the baron was not in error, we have a disagreeable duty to perform; no less than to censure the memory of a dead officer, and cause his name to be stricken from the rolls in disgrace. Here comes the sergeant."

Sergeant Poirier, the same scoundrel who had been found by Gerald, two nights previous, dead drunk, by the lighted candle in the straw, was now ushered in.

The sergeant had done his best to clean up since the explosion, but he had not the advantage of a change of raiment, like his commander. He still looked pretty dirty, and his red and bloated countenance was a perfect index to his character.

Cormontaigne eyed him sharply.

"What is your name?"

"Baptiste Poirier."

This was said with a hiccup. The sergeant had already managed to procure liquor enough to make him happy.

"What is your rank?"

"Sergeant of the Fifth Squadron, dragoons of Picardy."

"Where were you when the explosion took place?"

"Riding for my life, by the pond of Doigny."

"Did you see Count Desmond, during the fight?"

"No, monsieur."

"Were you, or any of your men, drunk on that day?"

"I deny it," said Poirier, valiantly. "We had been drinking, but all the brandy in the storehouse was spilt in the pond by the captain, and we only had one bottle hidden away. One bottle of brandy couldn't make two men drunk, you know, Monsieur le Marechal."

"Two men—had you no more in camp?"

"Yes, your excellency, eight—two to each bottle."

"Had you four bottles of brandy, then?"

"Yes, monsieur, I scorn to lie."

"When did you last see Count Desmond?" asked Cormontaigne, after a long pause of silent thought.

"When Lieutenant Carroll took the watch and went to visit the pickets on the Tournay road. The count went to his tent to sleep."

"Who led you into the fight?"

"Lieutenant Carroll, monsieur. He accused us of being drunk, and made us follow him and charge a whole squadron with eight men. We were glad to get out, before we'd been long in. Then the baron called out, '*Suave qui pevit*,' and we ran away. Sergeant Bonard fired the train a little too soon, though."

"You can go, sergeant. Orderly, report him a prisoner to the officer of the guard, as you take him out."

The sergeant's face fell as he went out, but he said to the orderly, with an air of triumph:

"I shall not stay long, comrade. There are too many heads in danger if I tell all I know. Your marshal is an old fool."

Cormontaigne, on his part, said to the assembled officers:

"Gentlemen, I think we have heard enough. The whole party was clearly drunk, except perhaps Lieutenant Carroll. Let us make up our report."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADAME ANTOINETTE.

A LARGE and handsome chateau stood on the summit of a gentle hill a few miles from Tournay. It was the same at whose doors Gerald Desmond had left the young and beautiful Therese Le Normand, on the night before the ill-fated explosion.

In the large saloon of the chateau, picturesque and old-fashioned in its furniture, the same beautiful lady whom we have mentioned before, under the name of Madame Antoinette, was walking up and down, in a manner expressive of great agitation, while near her the enigmatical Arouet was seated at a table, quietly sipping his coffee.

Madame Antoinette suddenly stopped in her walk, and spoke to him in a manner expressive of great nervous irritation.

"Arouet, you will drive me mad with your coolness! Have you no heart, no pity? This horrible news has completely unnerved me, and you sit there as composed as if nothing had happened."

"On the contrary, madam," said Arouet, quietly, "it seems to me that I am the greatest loser. By the unfortunate death of this young man, I have lost ten thousand francs, out of which I should have made twenty, in time."

"Money, money, still money!" she exclaimed, impetuously. "Heavens, what a strange compound you are! With a brain such as no man in Europe can boast of, you are tied down with a load of avarice that the veriest *bourgeois* might be ashamed to own. Are you not rich? Does this loss disturb your sleep? Have you not plenty still?"

"It is precisely for that reason, *ma chere*, that I do not rave. Thank Heaven, I am a philosopher—in a velvet coat. None the less, I maintain that I have lost more than you."

"It is false," she cried, with flashing eyes. "Have I not lost my peace of mind forever? Did not I send him here, did I not advance him and make him the envy of the court, and has it not brought his blood on my soul? And, oh, he was so young and handsome, and he loved me, Arouet, he loved me for myself. Have I lived among these false cowards so long, not to know that every one is selfish at heart, as selfish—ay, as selfish as you, with all your genius? One worships me because he fears my wit, and another because he sees in my accursed beauty the signs of future power of which he may reap the benefits by befriending me now. Only he loves me—no—*did* love me for myself, not knowing who I was, not caring, trusting with the grand faith of a noble nature in me whom he invested with virtues I never shall possess—woe is me! And this brave, simple young knight, peer to the great Bayard himself, I have sent to an inglorious death for my sake. Can I never forgive myself?"

The thin, sarcastic lip of Arouet curled.

"I think you will, *ma chere*. Well, be it so. You say nothing of your sister-in-law, my pupil. She too has disappeared. Where is she?"

"Happier than I, Arouet. Therese was wiser. She saw his nature, and loved him from the first moment she saw him. What if she did wander off to a sudden death. She died with him. For her fate I am not to blame."

Arouet rose, with unwonted dignity.

"Pardon me, madame, you are."

"Me?"

Her tone was indignant.

"Explain yourself, monsieur."

"Simple enough. You took such an interest in this youth, that you availed yourself of the foolish passion of Therese to send her out here to watch over his safety. A pure young girl, the only good member of a vile family, is left alone in a house of servants, between two contending armies, to watch over a soldier. Why did you not keep him in Paris?"

"You know, none better, that his life was not safe an hour. Etiolles, Richelieu, all those who are interested in seeing me in power, feared that his presence might ruin their schemes. I sent him there to be safe."

"And Therese—why should she be exposed to danger?"

"Because she wished it. You do not know what this love is, Arouet, you, who have no passion, nothing but an intellect of ice."

Arouet quivered slightly, and compressed his thin lips.

"You have reason," he said, quietly. "Yet, I swear to you, madame, that if by giving up all my hard-earned fortune I could bring back my pupil to life, I would go back to-morrow to be the lackey to great men I once was, before I conquered independence, and made even nobles fear the pen and tongue of truth and eternal justice."

The shriveled face of the old man glowed as if with inspiration, as he spoke with unwonted energy, and its yellow, cadaverous hue warmed slightly.

Madame Antoinette stopped and held out her white hand.

"Let us not quarrel, Arouet," she said. "You tell me the truth, at least. You hide your heart well, old friend."

"Should I not?" he answered, bitterly. "Do you remember when De Rohan's lackeys avenged the sarcasm with sticks, that their master's tongue was too slow to retort? Two years in the Bastille is an education to craft. Let it pass. Therese is gone. Desmond is gone. We must bury our dead in our hearts and live on. You, too, will learn selfishness in time. To-night you are invited to the 'little supper' of the king. It is the crisis of your fate."

"What if I will not go?" she said.

"You will," he said, frigidly.

"And why, if I do not choose—"

"Because you are necessary to France, to progress, to humanity."

"France, progress, humanity!" she echoed, bitterly. "Will they give back the life I have sacrificed, the love I have lost in him?"

"One can not have every thing," he answered, icily. "You are too exacting, *ma chere*; you can not have two lovers forever, and the one you will have is too jealous to brook rivals."

She was about to answer, when the door was thrown open, and a servant announced in a loud voice:

"Monsieur le Baron, madame."

Etiolles entered the room with a rapid step, followed by several servants, and abruptly addressed Madame Antoinette in a harsh tone, saying:

"So, madame, I understand that my sister has disappeared from the chateau. Is this true?"

"None should know better than you," she replied, sarcastically. "I am told that you were on duty in the direction in which she went."

"Very good, madame. Then allow me to inform you that in that direction, yesterday, happened a terrible explosion. If she went out to carry a message to your lover, he and she are buried together. Do you hear?"

"To what end do you tell me this, monsieur?"

"Simply that you may know that he is dead, madame. So perish all that attempt the honor of Etiolles."

"Then you mean to say that you had a hand in his death?" asked Madame Antoinette, with a strange glitter in her eyes.

He came up closer to her, and fixed his eyes on hers.

"You know I did," he said, in a deep, grating whisper. "He is dead. Now, refuse, if you dare, to do my will. Your name shall be trumpeted from one end of France to the other, and there will be no coronet to hide that shame."

For a moment it seemed as if Madame Antoinette would strike the baron in the face as he stood before her. Her face grew white as death, and her eyes glared dangerously.

Then she too leaned forward and spoke in a whisper:

"You have owned it. Rest content. To-night the end will be accomplished. But you, you who would sell your honor for money, take care that you are not cheated of the price."

Without another word she turned and swept from the room with the port of a queen, leaving Etiolles standing doubtfully looking after her.

He was roused by the sharp metallic voice of Arouet.

"Hola, *mon baron*, you look thoughtful. Rest tranquil. The game is ours. The little supper will decide the case."

Etiolles turned round savagely.

"Old meddler," he hissed, "you were *his* friend. How do you like the loss of your ten thousand francs?"

"My dear baron," said the other, tranquilly, taking snuff, "I never repine at losses till the game is over. It is not finished yet. We are partners in future. Why should we trump each other's best cards by quarreling? I own it is a trying position for a model husband like you to be placed in, but courage. The coronet will hide a multitude of—"

He whispered the last word with a mocking leer.

The baron stamped his heel, uttered a furious oath, and rushed from the room.

Arouet laughed sardonically.

"He'll not quarrel with me," he muttered.

CHAPTER XXV.

A "LITTLE SUPPER."

WITHIN sound of the guns of Tournay, but sheltered from missiles by an intervening eminence, stood the huge, rambling Chateau Gauram, occupied by his majesty, with all his retinue.

The Chateau Gauram had been the residence of powerful barons in the middle ages, who had fenced it with massive walls, turrets with pointed roofs, a great square donjon, with extensive outworks, surrounding the whole with a broad, deep moat, which opened into the river Scheldt. Their successors, in more civilized days, had converted the fortress into a palace fit for a king, and which indeed required a princely income to render it habitable, so vast was its extent. For the king of France and his court there was room and to spare. The old line of the curtains was now broken by huge windows; the turrets were only used for side staircases; and the grand hall, a hundred and fifty feet square, by forty in height, was turned into a ball-room, blazing with lights.

On the night of the king's arrival in Tournay there was to be a "little supper," at least such was the announcement at first, but it became whispered about that the "little supper" was in reality to be a grand entertainment, as far as numbers and feasting went, while its private character was to be maintained by the fact of the visitors being all masked and in dominoes.

It was true that the enemy was positively reported as advancing, and that every now and then a shell from Tournay dropped near the chateau, while the siege-guns kept up a regular, though slow cannonade. Still, the danger was not serious, for that night at least, and its proximity added just sufficient spice to the entertainment to render it charming.

Just about sunset, carriages and horsemen began to arrive. There were but few of the former, for most of the court ladies were lodged in the palatial extent of the chateau; but generals, colonels, and captains, dukes, counts and barons, were galloping in by scores from the army around, passing up the long avenues of gleaming cuirassiers, seated on their horses, holding torches that would be lighted as soon as it was dark.

A short distance from the chateau rose a little hill, by the side of the Scheldt, which commanded an extensive view of the country toward Brussels. On the summit of this hill, in the crimson rays of the sunset, a low basket-carriage was standing, and beside it a little group of horsemen.

The handsome, dissipated face of Richelieu, the king's favorite, the pale and youthful features of the Duke de Grammont, and several other officers of note, were to be seen there, around the helpless bulk of the old marshal, who seemed to be explaining something to them, pointing frequently at the prospect below.

There, not two miles off, lay the white lines of tents of the army covering the siege, and Saxe was

explaining the position to Richelieu, who was in turn to report it to the king.

"Yonder, monsieur le duc," said the old marshal, "you see the Scheldt winding away to the sea. In that large curve lies the bridge of Colone, behind the army."

"Is it the only bridge?" asked Richelieu, keenly.

"By no means, monsieur. There are six others, of pontoons."

"Still, we shall fight with a river behind us. That will be awkward in case of defeat."

"Monsieur le duc, we shall not be defeated. Besides it is too late to change our position on the eve of a battle."

"Continue, monsieur le marechal," said Richelieu, coldly.

"On the right of our position, monsieur, you see the village of Antoine, by the river. In the center, and close to it, is Fontenoy. On the left, and drawn back, is Gauram and the wood of Barry. You see we are drawn up in a half moon, swelling outward a little. Fontenoy is the key of the position, and I defy them to take Fontenoy. It is covered with works fit to defy any army in Europe. Marlborough would have failed to take it, with any sort of defense."

Richelieu nodded.

"I see, I see. And Antoine?"

"It is equally strong, and one continuous intrenchment to Fontenoy. On the right we are absolutely safe."

"So far, so good. Now the left."

"The wood covers the flank, and there is a heavy redoubt there, also one near Fontenoy."

Richelieu looked keenly in the direction indicated.

"Between Gauram and Fontenoy, are there any works?"

Saxe hesitated.

"To say the truth, monsieur le duc, I could wish we had time to put one more redoubt there, but the enemy are too close. Otherwise, the position would be absolutely impregnable. The approach is enfiladed by the two redoubts, and the ground is difficult, furrowed by ravines. The reserve will be drawn up behind the gap, and we must trust to French valor to defend it."

Richelieu smiled slightly and shook his head.

"The crisis will come *there*. Do you not think so?"

"I own it. You see the whole position."

"I will report it to his majesty, marshal. Have you a safe place for him?"

"At the mill and chapel of Our Lady of the Wood. It is a hill behind Fontenoy, and commands the whole field. Will his majesty be there?"

"Without fail. Good-evening, marshal."

The group broke up as the sun set, and Richelieu galloped to the chateau, while Saxe drove down to the army.

It was a strange sight to a person standing on the top of the hill, as the darkness crept on, and especially to one knowing the state of things. Below, in the distance, glittered the camp-fires of the covering army, and far away in the gathering darkness were the twinkling lights of the Allies, who had been slowly arriving during the day, and taking up their position opposite the French.

On the other side the occasional sullen boom of a cannon from the trenches before Tournay told of a second army already in action, and yet, between the two, careless and joyous, the Chateau Gauram was all ablaze with lights, while the sweet strains of the numerous bands told of the festivities going on in sight of the contending forces, so to speak.

As the darkness advanced the cuirassiers lighted their torches, and sat patiently on their horses on each side of the long avenue, watching carriages and horsemen dash up to the principal entrance. The court of the chateau was crammed with led horses, and such a crowd was there that the carriages were compelled to drive out when they had deposited their loads, and wait in the garden. In short, it was one of those grand "crushes," of which we in America have but little idea, and only possible under the unlimited expenditure of an absolute monarch.

The grand hall was already nearly full of guests, and the open doors disclosed beyond it, the long vista of the old guard-rooms, armories and chapel, now turned into banqueting rooms. At the end of all was a little oratory, about twenty feet square, now to be used for secular purposes, for in that little room was laid out the assigned cause for all this festivity, the "little supper" at which only the king and a few intimates were to sit down.

In the hall, meanwhile, the guests were promenading to the sounds of sweet music, and waiting for the opening of the ball. The gentlemen were all masked, but in uniform, and there was little difficulty in recognizing persons. The ladies, with few exceptions, wore dominoes, and were thus effectually disguised.

Presently there was a bustle at one end of the room, and the king made his appearance, with a small train of courtiers, all unmasked. His majesty was accompanied by a lady in white satin, covered with folds of costly lace, and fairly scintillating light as she walked, so profuse were the ornaments of diamonds which she wore. She alone, of all the train, wore a white satin mask, above which her bright golden hair was thrown back in a coronet-like wave, gathered in a comb set with diamonds, and falling down over her statuesque neck and broad white shoulders in a profusion of ringlets, undisturbed by powder. The lady was tall and stately, and her bare arms, rounded and symmetrical, were loaded with bracelets.

Beside her imperial beauty of form, even though her face was hidden, the king looked small and mean in figure. His court dress, covered with jewels, could not save him from appearing as a foil to the lady at his side.

At the entrance of the royal party there was an instant hush over the hall, so that a pin might have been heard to drop. The musicians, who had been playing a march, stopped suddenly, for they had not received the proper signal to strike up the royal anthem. In fact, for a moment, the silence became oppressive.

Then gradually arose a low, whispered buzz among all the vast crowd.

"Who is she? Who can she be?"

Noticeable among the crowd, near the entrance of the hall, was a man of vast height and Herculean frame, who wore the uniform of green and scarlet,

of the Irish brigade. From under his black mask rose the curling points of a huge red mustache, the ends of which came nearly to his eyes, though they seemed to have been sadly thinned and scorched by some recent fire.

He stood in the midst of the crowd, gazing intently at the masked lady on the king's right hand.

Hanging on the arm of this gigantic cavalier was a lady, in a white domino faced with yellow satin, and the jetty curl that strayed out from under the hood of the domino at one side, showed that the lady had consulted her brunette complexion in her choice of colors.

As the king entered and his party became visible, this lady uttered a low exclamation from under her mask.

"*Mon Dieu, c'est Antoinette! C'est fini!*"

(Heavens, it is Antoinette! It is all over!)

The tall cavalier pressed her arm warningly.

"One must not speak yet," he muttered, under his breath.

It was true. The silence of the band seemed to be intentional, for the king turned his head and spoke a few words to an obsequious courtier behind him, who bore a long gold stick in his hand.

As gold stick stepped forward the yellow, shriveled visage of Arouet, without any mask, was seen to appear close to the elbow of the lady in the white and yellow domino.

"*Chut, ma chérie*," he whispered, hastily. "You are trembling so that you will ruin all. It is fated. One can do no more. After all, whatever is, is right."

The lady put out a small white hand and grasped the old courtier by the sleeve with nervous haste.

"Where is *he*?" she whispered, in a low tone of anxiety. "Not here, for heaven's sake! He loves her."

Arouet elevated his shoulders to the side of his ears.

"What matter? Others have loved and lost."

Here there was a low hiss around them, warning them to silence.

Gold stick was clearing his throat to speak.

"*Messieurs et mesdames*," cried the functionary, in a loud, shrill voice, "by the order of his gracious majesty, Louis, King of France, and in order to show his majesty's consideration for the most fascinating and beautiful lady in France, I have the honor to announce to you that his majesty has been pleased this day to appoint Madame Jeanne Antoinette Le Normand d'Etiolles to the position of first lady of the palace to her majesty the queen."

There was a low buzz of interest, but gold stick had not finished. He gave a loud "*hem!*" and proceeded.

"And whereas his majesty wishes none but ladies of the highest rank as well as beauty to attend near his own sacred person, he has been pleased this day, by letters patent, signed with his own gracious hand, and sealed with the seal of France, to create Jeanne Antoinette Le Normand d'Etiolles, *nee* Poisson, to be, and I hereby announce her as

MADAME LA MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR."

As he pronounced the last words, the lady by the king's side removed her mask, and disclosed the features of *Madame Antoinette*. At the same moment, gold stick signaled to the band, and every piece in the hall struck up the old air written by Henry IV., "*Charmante Gabrielle*." Then, at a silent but well-understood signal, every mask fell from the faces of the company, and a buzz of conversation arose.

The only exceptions were the tall cavalier and his fair charge. They remained masked, and the man was looking eagerly over the heads of the crowd, as if in search of something, while the lady clung to his arm, trembling violently.

Presently, however, over the music, rose the sounds of excited voices in the center of the hall, and a disturbance seemed to have taken place there. There were cries of alarm:

"He's dead." "No, only a faint." "Carry him out." "Give him air."

The lady by the side of the gigantic masked cavalier spoke to him in a tone of low but eager entreaty.

"Monsieur Carroll, for God's sake, go see him. It is he! Bon Dieu, I know it must be he, and he has recognized her. His heart is broken."

Carroll, for the reader has doubtless recognized our old friend ere this, hesitated, and observed:

"But you—who will take care of you?"

"That will I," said the sharp voice of Arouet, in tones of unwonted gravity. "Go, brave Irishman, and rescue thy comrade. I doubt it is another, however, or I mistake my brave protegee."

Carroll bowed hastily, resigned the lady to Arouet, and strode through the crowd with gigantic steps, parting the people as if they had been children. In a few moments he arrived at a little open space near the dais, on which the court was stationed, and beheld a strange scene.

In the center of a circle, on the floor, lay Baron d'Etiolles, shaking from head to foot in a violent fit, while above him, looking down with a face of deadly pallor, was the noble figure of the lost *Gerald Desmond*, supposed to be dead.

Desmond was in full uniform, more splendid than ever, but his face wore the look of a man who has just received a mortal wound.

Carroll looked up at the dais.

The king was contemplating the scene with a sarcastic smile, as if he felt perfectly satisfied with the result.

A little behind him, Madame de Pompadour, for it was indeed that brilliant and guilty woman, had fallen into an arm-chair and was slowly swaying a feather fan backward and forward, with an air of serene carelessness, while she contemplated the scene.

Carroll looked at her earnestly. He had too often heard her described not to recognize in the guilty mistress of the king the angel and idol of Gerald's vision, the mysterious Madame Antoinette. He devoured her with a fierce, hungry gaze. Carroll was a devoted friend, Irish to the backbone, who loved and hated with the same fiery intensity; and at that moment he execrated the fine lady to the bottom of his heart.

There she sat, cold as ice, her face set in the mask of cold effrontery that she was doomed to wear forever after, without a sign of feeling either for the husband who lay dying, to all seeming, before her, or the other and nobler nature that she had just stabbed to the heart. Risen from the dead, as he seemed to her, for she had never believed him alive

till that moment, nothing seemed to astonish or move her.

But the keen, hungry eyes of the Irishman, watching her when others were looking elsewhere, beheld one sign which caused him to turn away with a short, fierce laugh of satisfaction.

"Ye feel it, do ye, ye cursed light o' love?" he muttered, savagely.

He had seen a little drop of blood on the white chin, under the closely-compressed lips.

Madame Pompadour had bitten her lower lip through and through!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLUNGE.

It seems about time that we should go back a little, and explain how it was that Gerald Desmond, left asleep within a hundred feet of a bursting powder-mill, had escaped unharmed, when Carroll, who had been nearly a quarter of a mile off, had received such injuries.

Our readers will have likewise begun to suspect, in all probability, the identity of the lady in the white and yellow domino; and it seems just that we should explain the circumstances.

We left Therese seated on her little chestnut mare, and regarding, with astonishment and delight, the sleeping form of Gerald Desmond, whom she had believed engaged in the fight beyond.

Therese Le Normand was a very foolish young lady, it must be confessed, for she had fallen desperately in love with the handsome Irish count, who, on his part treated her with studied coolness, and ardently loved her sister-in-law, a married woman, in all innocence, believing her a pure and perfect maiden or widow, he knew not which. Therese knew perfectly well that she could have shattered all this bright portrait with a word, for she was doomed to see, powerless to prevent the vile clandestine intrigues by which Madame d'Etiolles was forced upon the king by her own husband, assisted by an infamous family, who hoped to profit in worldly fortune by the sale of their honor. She knew all this, and yet forbore to speak that word, from an innate delicacy, the more remarkable in this girl, surrounded as she was, by vicious and dishonorable influences ever since she left the convent in which she was educated.

But Therese Le Normand possessed one of those rare natures of purity, that only seem to retain the good they are taught, rejecting the evil. The lessons of the good nuns had left her strong against all evil, and she had moved amid the atmosphere of a vicious court, pure and uncontaminated. Out of the foul mine had come a lustrous diamond.

Now she gazed on Gerald with a singular mixture of love and fear. The love was wholly unselfish. She knew him surrounded by enemies, who saw that Madame d'Etiolles was inclined, in her caprice, to mar all their plans by an indiscreet passion for a handsome youth, who might arouse the jealousy of the king, and cause him to relinquish a pursuit he entered on but coldly. Her own brother was head of those enemies, alarmed still more by the extraordinary pains taken by madame to advance her protegee. To do this, she had not scrupled to use her power with her royal lover, and Etiolles had only succeeded in his counter-scheme by the influence of his fellow-conspirator, Richelieu. These courtiers wished the king employed and amused at any hazard. Otherwise, he might take it into his head to govern, perhaps to interfere with Richelieu and his clique, among them Etiolles.

Therese knew her brother was planning Gerald's destruction, by what means she knew not yet, but she dared not awake Gerald. And meanwhile the battle was growing hotter in the forest.

She was saved from the necessity by the conduct of the count's horse, which frightened her excessively. The animal strained at his halter-chain, reared and plunged round the tree, and at last in his efforts lashed out one of his hind feet, and kicked a shower of sand and gravel over the sleeping officer, stinging him sharply.

In a moment Gerald was on his feet, awake and collected, and coming to his senses with the readiness of a soldier who is used to night alarms. There were no rubbing of eyes and yawning, but instead, a fierce burst of anger at the horse for waking him, in which he threw a handful of gravel at him with spiteful vehemence, bringing the beast to order at once.

The next moment the sounds of the firing below caught his ear. He started, turned, and found himself face to face with Therese.

"Mademoiselle Le Normand!"

"The same, monsieur le comte. For Heaven's sake, come away with me. They are fighting below, and our people are being driven back."

Gerald started and looked down.

As he did so, Le Borgne dashed out of the wood, and went galloping up the ridge to fire the train.

"What does that mean?" the young captain muttered, anxiously.

Le Borgne had hardly disappeared in the wood on the ridge, when Jack Carroll came tearing out near the mill, followed by the dragoons, and dashed down-hill into the fight.

A moment later, the pretended page of Etiolles came running to them, her face white with frantic terror. She fell at Desmond's feet.

"My God, monsieur le comte, do you know what they are going to do? In a moment more, they will blow up the mill. Le Borgne has gone to fire the train."

Gerald's face grew pale and his eyes glittered.

"What train, boy? Quick, what train?"

"The train in the woods to the mill," faltered the pretended boy, ashy pale. "It is all planned, monsieur. They are to gallop past here and entice the English to follow. When they are here and our men across the pond, the mill will be blown into the air. My God, monsieur, here they come. We have no time to lose. Save yourself."

Gerald hesitated only a moment. One rapid glance round. He shook his clenched fist savagely at Etiolles, as the baron, with a mob of followers, thundered past at that very moment in a cloud of dust, not seeing anything in the hurry and blinding confusion. With loud shouts, the English came streaming up the hill in pursuit. Then, with a muttered curse of fiery rage at the treacherous trick he had been subjected to, he strode to Therese, plucked her off her horse with desperate strength,

and ran along the ridge to the edge of the water, carrying the girl and followed by Giannina, who was shrieking and crying with useless terror.

A moment later he stood by the deep black pool, with Therese in his arms, and looked fiercely round. The English had reached the mill, and were riding round it, waving their swords and shouting with triumph. Several were rushing toward the little group of three by the edge of the water shouting, "Surrender!"

Gerald cast a glance across the pond. Etioles and his mob were streaming along the other side, spurring frantically, and about a third of a mile from the mill. Then he spoke to Giannina harshly, for the moment was one of supreme danger, and he thought her a boy:

"Silence, you cowardly hound! When I leap, follow."

Still he stood by the bank, watching, and careless of the cuirassiers firing at him.

He was watching for the flash of the train.

Presently he saw a serpentine ribbon of lightning come tearing through the dark wood beyond the mill. It disappeared behind the shed, and at the same instant three figures plunged down headlong into twenty feet of water.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SAVED BY WATER.

Down into the cold depths of the pond plunged Gerald and his two companions, at the very instant of the explosion. With the coolness and self-command of a veteran, the soldier had waited for that moment. Had he leaped sooner, he would have risked coming to the surface while the explosion was taking place. A moment later, and the air would have been a sea of flame. The exposure of an inch of surface to that fiery blast meant utter annihilation, standing as he was, not two hundred feet from the mine.

Down, down, into the dark depths he plunged perpendicularly, the bank being at its steepest, the water at its deepest. Therese was clasped in his arms, nearly insensible, and Giannina, the false page, was at his side. The water roared in his ears as he went down, and it seemed an age to the diver, as he descended, never so slowly as then.

The bubbles were still circling above his head, not six inches from the surface, when a tremendous quivering shock took place. Gerald felt as if he had received a stunning blow in the chest, knocking all the breath out of his body, and heard the heavy crash that told of the explosion. Down in the dark water, it sounded like the peal of ten thousand thunders, bursting close to his ears.* So fearful was the shock that he became partially insensible.

And then succeeded an awful silence, broken, after a while, by successive dull blows, that vibrated through the elastic medium from every direction, far and near, as the fragments of wreck were scattered in the water.

Then, slowly, slowly, his breath nearly spent, he felt himself rising to the surface, till, with a sense of overpowering gratitude, his head rose out of the water, just long enough for him to take breath, and he found himself going down again.

The reason was very simple. His cuirass and sword were carrying him down, when the elastic rebound of the explosion had caused him to rise. But he was an old swimmer, and a vigorous man. Moreover, he was not ten feet from the bank. By desperate efforts he managed to swim that ten feet, almost under water, and felt in his hand the soft clay of the embankment. His fair charge seemed to be now quite insensible, and offered no hindrance, by clinging or otherwise, to his efforts. Once having his hand on the bank, the rest was possible. Digging his fingers into the clay with desperate tenacity, he succeeded in drawing his head out of the water, and allowed himself to hang for a moment, while he panted to recover his breath. Therese, not weighed down as he was, floated motionless beside him, her face pale and lifeless, her eyes closed.

Then the soldier cast his eyes round, and shuddered at the peril he had escaped.

The water seemed to be covered with wrecks, for his eyes, close to the surface, met nothing but spars and trunks of trees, or the horrible fragments of human bodies.

A little way off, he heard a splashing and struggling, with the gurgling shrieks of a drowning person, half-choked by water. He saw the arms of the unfortunate page tossed wildly in the air, and realized for the first time that the boy could not swim. And he could not save him!

Even had he been able to leave the senseless Therese, he knew that he could not rescue a drowning person, incumbered as he was with armor.

What was to be done?—for the boy was evidently sinking.

Hastily whirling round, in some vague expectation of help, his head received a blow from something sharp, and he found that the jagged, splintered end of a large post had floated close to him.

With rapid decision he pushed Therese close to the bank, on the arm that was clutching the clay, and gave a powerful shove with his left hand to the spar, just as the boy's head came to the surface, uttering a wild shriek.

"Catch the spar!" he shouted, as it went joggling slowly through the water, toward the drowning one.

He had no time to see more, for at that moment his hand slipped from the treacherous clay, and down he went with Therese under the water.

*Recent experiments made with large bells and other loud sounds on the lake of Geneva, Switzerland, demonstrate that, contrary to the general opinion, shocks are transmitted through water with greater intensity and to greater distances than through the air. An explosion of sufficient force to shake the earth would therefore be plainly heard in the water, even if the chief part of its strength were wasted in air. This note is thought necessary by the author for the benefit of those who might think the incident in his story impossible.

But he was too close to the bank to be in any serious danger now, and soon regained his old position. Finding that there seemed to be no holding-place that was not subject to the same dangers, he thought him of a plan, which he instantly adopted. Slowly and cautiously digging his fingers into the bank to retain his place, he caught hold of the loosened hair of Therese with his teeth, so as to sustain her head and leave one of his own hands free. It was his left, and with it he managed to pull out his sword, and raise it out of the water. Then, holding it by the blade, he struck the sharp point into the soft embankment, and felt safe. Once having it there, it was an easy matter to drive it deeper and deeper, till it was buried nearly to the hilt, and afforded a firm hold.

Then he had time to look round for the boy, and to his delight, found that the latter had seized the piece of wreck and was lying half across it, exhausted, but safe.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Gerald, fervently. "Having done so much for us, God will not desert us, surely."

The water was cold, and his situation irksome. Therese was still senseless, and to all appearance dead. His hold on the rapier, though secure, required a constant muscular effort which became more and more distressing, momentarily. When it relaxed, as it must at last, he must go down. Moreover, the weight of the insensible girl was becoming like lead, small as it was when half supported in the water. The bank was far too steep to climb, except by digging fingers and toes in its sides, and he was too utterly exhausted to do that. Still the young soldier despaired not. He had accomplished much, and he determined on more yet.

First he shifted hands on the sword, and allowed Therese to sink lower in the water, so that only her face was out. Twining a tress of her hair on the hand grasping the sword, he was enabled to rest a moment.

Then he turned and shouted to the boy:

"Pierre! Pierre! Whatever your name is, hollo there! Answer!"

The boy slowly rose on the spar, and feebly called back:

"Here, monsieur, nearly dead."

"Bah! you're worth twenty dead men yet," cried Gerald, scornfully. "Don't be a coward, lad. Listen to what I say. Your life and mine depend on it."

"Yes, monsieur," responded the seeming boy, feebly.

"Come, come," summon your courage, Pierre. I saved your life by shoving that beam toward you."

"Did you, monsieur?" asked Pierre, starting. Then he rose up with more alacrity than he had yet shown.

"Was it really you, monsieur, that pushed the beam this way?"

"Of course. What of it?"

Pierre threw a beaming glance of affection and gratitude at his deliverer.

"Oh, monsieur le comte," then you have saved me twice. Now, I am ready to die for you."

"Nonsense," said Gerald, sharply. "No driveling, Pierre. I don't want your life. I want you to help save mine. Be a man. Don't behave like a girl. One girl is enough to take care of."

In spite of the cold and exhaustion, a crimson blush came over the face of Giannina at Gerald's words. This girl was a bad, brazen creature, or she would not have been the mistress and tool of the villain Etioles, and yet there was something of the angel still lurking in her debased nature, which awakened to sudden life at that moment. She saw a brave, noble young man, at whose destruction she had connived, and who, when her villainous lover deserted her in the very moment of peril, had saved her life. Now, in his unsuspecting innocence, he could not even recognize the thin disguise which hid the sex she had dishonored so often; and Giannina felt a thrill of debasement in the thought that if he had he would have despised her.

From that moment she seemed a changed being.

"Be tranquil, monsieur," she said, with sudden calmness. "I will obey your orders as well as I know how."

"Good," said the young count, cheerily. "You are on that piece of wreck. Look round. Which is the nearest to you?"

Giannina looked round.

"The nearest is that broken tree. I can almost touch it."

"Good. Now paddle in the water with your hands, and urge your spar there. So, very well. It is a heavy piece of timber, and will hold us all. Get on it. Now turn the piece you just left toward me, take good aim, and shove it this way with all your force."

Giannina did as she was bid, and the ragged spar came joggling through the water, slowly but surely, till Gerald's outstretched hand fell upon it. In another moment he and Therese were resting on it, and he uttered a fervent thanksgiving.

He was stopped by a warning "hiss" from Pierre, who made a rapid sign, pointing up to the top of the bank, that some one approached. All covered under the bank in dead silence, Gerald listened with intense curiosity. He dreaded it to be an enemy. He hardly dared hope it was a friend.

They heard distinctly the clatter of accouterments, as a man cast himself heavily down on the earth, and a well-known voice groaned out:

"Ochone! Why did ye die, Gerald? Why did ye die? I'll never see your like again—ochone a ree! Ochone a ree!"

And then the deep, choking sobs of poor Carroll broke on the stillness. Gerald raised his hands to Heaven in thankfulness.

"Jack Carroll saved, too! God has been very merciful."

Then he elevated his voice, crying:

"Help, Jack, help, if ye ever loved me. We're all in the water, and too weak to get up the bank."

In a moment the cuirassier was on his feet with a stentorian yell of delight.

"Whoop! hurroo! Erin go bragh! And he ain't dead, at all, at all, only kilt! Oh, the murdering thieves! the dirty tinkers! We'll give them Bally Carroll before we've done, for this day's work."

Amidst all his exclamations, he was running up and down the bank, preparing to help his friends, with the readiness of an old campaigner. Pieces of bridle-reins, his own belt, and every thing capable

of making a strong cord, were gathered and knotted in haste, the delighted Carroll humming an old Irish lilt all the while.

Ten minutes after the whole party was on the bank, gathered round the insensible form of Therese. Long and persevering were their efforts, at last crowned with success, for she opened her eyes, and sighed just as darkness set in.

And almost at the same moment they were startled by the sound of a horse's feet, coming from the ruins of the mill.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MONSIEUR AROUET.

In the gathering shadows of evening they could distinguish that the approaching horseman was muffled in a long roquelaure, and rode a little fat cob. From the absence of clinking weapons, it was evident that he was a civilian.

Gerald uttered a joyful exclamation as he distinguished the well-known outline.

"Monsieur Arouet, it is you? Thank God for that!"

"Who is this thanking God for being blown up?" asked the high, sarcastic voice of Arouet, in his cynical manner. "It seems to me that he has not left you much to be thankful for, except life, and that is not to be envied, if one is crippled."

Carroll looked up with amazement.

"Who the devil are ye, ye blaspheming haythen, so ye are? It's little your life's worth if ye hold thim opinions. Doesn't the praste tell us to be thankful for our marcies, and haven't we saved ourselves alive, when a hundred poor cr'atures were blown to smithereens before our eyes?"

"An Irishman, by the sentiment," exclaimed Arouet. "I can not see thee in the dark, my brave fellow, but I'll swear 'tis an Irishman, one of that nation of giants that lets the priests lead them all by a hook in the nose."

Carroll was about to reply angrily, when Gerald laid his hand on his arm, and whispered:

"'Tis a friend, and he does not know us. Hush."

Then turning to Arouet, and disguising his voice, he asked:

"Who are you, monsieur, and what seek you?"

"If I were to mention my name, friend, you would all know it, for it has made Europe ring. At present, I am plain Francois Arouet, and I am searching for the remains of a little investment, which, I fear, has departed to the skies."

Arouet spoke in his usual cynical, sneering tone, but there was an under-current of anxiety in his manner, as he continued:

"Who are you, messieurs? Have you, like me, come to view these horrible ruins? Are you French or enemies?"

"If we were enemies, monsieur, you would not have been safe so long," said Gerald, smiling.

"Oh, I do not know," said Arouet, carelessly. "I am a non-combatant, and not liable to seizure. So much law I learned in the days of my youth. But if you are French you must know whether any were saved from this explosion besides Etioles and his troop."

"What?" asked Gerald, eagerly, "were they saved?"

"For example, what a question!" cried Arouet, mockingly. "Is the Baron d'Etioles a man to be blown up? More likely to blow up others, as I fear is the case. Yes, he is safe. But have you seen or heard anything of the commander of the post, one Count Desmond?"

"Have you a great interest in the count, monsieur?"

"Eh, *parbleu*, I should think so. If he is dead, my ten thousand francs are gone to the skies, indeed."

"Well, monsieur, he lives, and I am he."

Arouet uttered a shrill "*sac-r-re nom*," and bundled off his pony in less time than one would have believed possible. The next moment he was hugging Gerald with an impetuosity that belied his previous cynical tone, crying out:

"My brave boy, it is thou indeed, better than fifty thousand francs to old Arouet. Thanks to the good God, that even the priests can not hide from the people."

"But, Monsieur Arouet," said Gerald, gravely, "you know not who else is here, saved by the same merciful God."

He related in a few brief words the arrival of Therese, the explosion, and their escape, and assigned the young lady to the charge of her old friend, just as she recovered her full senses.

Two hours later, a party of four people on foot, surrounding a lady on a little pony, entered at a remote wing of the Chateau Gauram, which had been assigned in advance by the grand chamberlain as the residence of the "court historiographer," during the king's stay at Tournay.

The lady was taken off her horse, and tenderly handed into the anteroom by old Arouet, who locked the door when his friends were admitted.

"It is well fortunate, my friends," said Arouet, rubbing his hands, "that I concluded to precede the king by a day, and that his majesty allowed it. Otherwise, I should not have heard the explosion, and ridden over to inquire about it, and you would not have been saved so nicely. As it is, remember, you are all dead, till I give the word. For you, monsieur le comte, I have your word and bond to obey my orders. For you, my pupil, I trust to your honor. For you, Monsieur Carroll, I know you will not disoblige mademoiselle. Pierre, I know, will not speak. Hold, my friends, I have a plan which I will not tell you yet. It is supposed you are all dead. It is best you should seem so, till to-morrow night. Meanwhile, the historian to his majesty has room and to spare at your service."

While he was speaking, the old gentleman was bustling about from one room to another, preparing quarters for his unexpected visitors. Luckily, as he had said, he had room and to spare, though far off, for the chateau was nearly five hundred feet long, and he soon had them comfortably settled for the night.

It will thus not be hard for the reader to guess that it was according to the wily scheme of Arouet, and by his means, that Carroll, Gerald and Therese

made their appearance at the "little supper," to which we can therefore return.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ARREST.

MONSIEUR AROUET was, before all, an intriguer, and it need not be wondered at that he concealed all knowledge of his little plan from Madame Antoinette on the day of the "little supper."

He had fitted out Gerald and Carroll, with the more readiness that the baggage of the former had been discovered, almost uninjured, in the woods near the site of the old camp, where it had been, several hundred yards from the explosion, sheltered by woods. True, the animals were all killed by the shock, but the heavy leathern trunks had protected their contents from the straggling grass fire, and the uniforms were unhurt.

Business-like in all things, Arouet had drawn up an exact account of his expenditures, for which he made Gerald sign an acknowledgment, which the soldier readily did to oblige this strange compound of opposite qualities.

In the evening they all went to the "little supper," as we have seen, and Gerald soon found himself separated from his companions by the crowd.

The young officer was in a strange state of mind when he arrived at the ball. All day long, since the previous midnight, he had slept the deep sleep of utter exhaustion; and his faculties, before confused, were now quite clear.

Prominent over all other feelings was a burning desire for revenge on the persons who, he was satisfied, had attempted his life by the basest treachery. Carroll had explained to him all that was before obscure, and he realized that Etioles was at the head of his enemies. He did not yet know the full extent of the plot, nor its causes.

In a state of fiery but suppressed excitement, he entered the hall that evening. He had not seen Therese all day; the wily Arouet having carefully kept them asunder, till the moment for departing, when nothing passed between them but a formal salutation, before others. Gerald was far from suspecting what Therese had done for him. Carroll, in all his confidence, had avoided mentioning her name. The loyal Irishman was jealous of the smallest detractor from the dignity of the lady he adored as a superior being, and Gerald was too modest and simple to suspect her of any such thing as a passion for himself.

Thus, when the crowd swept him away from his friends, he had but one object in view, to find Etioles and to punish him. He wandered here and there in the crowd, searching for the uniform of the carabineers, and whenever he saw such an officer, he came close to him, and tried to ascertain his identity, in spite of the masks worn by all. Many times was he disappointed, and still he went from one to the other, till he found himself close beneath the royal dais, when his attention was attracted by a scrap of conversation between two officers of Musketeers.

"It is understood. The king proclaims her tonight. He has taken a new mistress at last, and La Tournelle is forgotten."

"And who is it, this time?"

"The little Poisson, the butcher's daughter, who married Etioles, nephew of Le Normand, the farmer-general."

"Her! *Sacristi!* why, she is not even noble."

"The king will make her noble. Pompadour will be revived. You know the old title has been in abeyance for long."

"But was there not a lover, somewhere? Some Irishman? I heard so."

"*Parbleu*, yes. I ought to remember him. Etioles and the duke set three of us on him and his friends, and we got the worst of it. I limp yet from the thrust I got then."

Gerald felt a thrill of excitement. He recognized the voice of his old antagonist, St. Foix. What did all this mean? He did not turn his head, but continued listening intently. St. Foix uttered a low, mocking laugh, as he continued:

"Yes, *morbieu*, but Etioles was too much for him. They say he was blown up in that mill, by Etioles's orders. He is a lucky fellow, Etioles."

"*Sacristi!* I should think so. The king must make him Governor of India, at the least, to heal his wounded honor."

Both the Musketeers burst into a scornful laugh at this, which instantly died away, as a low, smooth voice said, close to them:

"Take care, messieurs. You are jesting on serious subjects."

Gerald wheeled sharply round, and beheld the pale, aristocratic features of Richelieu, unmasked, while beside him he recognized with fierce exultation the figure of Etioles.

The Musketeers, overwhelmed with confusion, bowed low and backed away, muttering incoherent excuses. Gerald, his mind in a whirl of confusion, was yet sensible of a sudden hush in the hall, and looking up, saw the entrance of the king and the scene that we have described, ending with the proclamation of the Marquise de Pompadour, and the disclosure of the face of Madame Antoinette.

Then the whole truth burst on him at once, and he realized that the angel of his dreams, the idol of his heart, was none other than the wife of Etioles, and the base creature who had sold her honor to the king.

Mechanically he followed the example of the rest, and unmasked. As he did so, his fierce glare of mortal anguish and hate met the eyes of Etioles. Its effect was immediate.

The baron uttered a hoarse cry, his eyes distended with horror, and he fell to the floor, shaking in an attack of epilepsy. In the midst of the confusion that followed, Gerald stood stupidly staring at his foe, hardly conscious of any thing but a dull sense of pain. He was awakened by the voice of St. Foix.

"Monsieur, I arrest you, in the king's name."

Richelieu looked at him, smiling sardonically.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ORDER OF RELEASE.

THE thunder of heavy guns had been rolling incessantly since daybreak on the morning of the 11th May, 1745, announcing that a general action was

taking place in front and around the village of Fontenoy.*

In the apartments of the royal historiographer, at the extreme left wing of the Chateau Gauram, a young officer of carabineers was sitting, in an attitude of deep dejection, listening to the sounds of the cannon. It was none other than Gerald Desmond, under arrest since the evening before, on charges preferred by Richelieu.

Near Gerald, pacing up and down like a caged tiger, listening to the same cannonade, was Jack Carroll, also under confinement.

The Irish cuirassier's offense was that he had interfered when his friend was arrested, and had almost drawn his sword in the presence of the king.

"Ah, bad luck to ye!" growled Carroll, furiously, as a more than usually heavy discharge shook the windows of the Chateau Gauram, "it's fine times ye're havin', all to yerselves out there. And to say, when the ould brigade gets face to face with the cursed Sassenachs, for the first time since the Boyne, we're both tied here like two hospital nurses, listening to the guns and waiting for the stretchers. Ah, Gerald, Gerald, 'twas a bad day for us, when ye went out roaming beyond bounds in the forest at Fontainebleau, and saved the life of that painted jade that's betrayed us both."

Gerald made no answer. His head sunk lower and lower. At that moment he wished for nothing in the world but death on the field, and even that was denied him.

"And that Etioles, too," continued Carroll, bitterly; "to think that the mean scoundrel who sells his own wife for court favor, should now be on the field, when we're here. Oh, but the day of reckoning will come yet, for us two! We've both been fools, I worst of any, to give the dog his life, to please that sister, that looked so pure. Ah, *diavol!*!"

The stout cuirassier shuddered all over with strong fury, and his face grew purple. Carroll, too, was disillusionized, for he had fallen down and worshipped Therese, and now he felt that he could not but suspect that she was soiled by that foul and corrupted court. Sister to Etioles, sister-in-law to Pompadour, what else could she be? Carroll groaned in agony at the thought.

To his surprise, Gerald looked up for the first time. His face was pale as death, but he spoke in a low, firm voice:

"Sir John Carroll, don't presume to connect with this plot the thought of Mademoiselle Le Normand. The man that insinuates dishonor to her, *lies*."

As he spoke the last word, he slowly rose up, and stood looking at his friend with a fixed and menacing stare.

As for Carroll, he fell back several steps, petrified with surprise. This was so great as to master even his indignation at the tone assumed by Gerald.

"Holy Mother of God!" he ejaculated, "are ye stark wild? when 'twas only two days ago ye treated her like a—"

"I know it," said Gerald, interrupting him; "but since that, Jack Carroll, I've lived ten years."

"Ten years?" said Carroll, innocently. "Sure 'twas only forty-eight hours, Gerald."

"Carroll," said Desmond, solemnly, "a man may live ten years of suffering and experience in a night. I have done that since my arrest. Listen. When I entered the hall of the Chateau, last night, I was a boy, burning for revenge on Etioles. I thought he was my rival in her love; I dreamed she was a princess; I thought of every wild thing that a young man's brain could think of; I thought of everything, *except the truth*. I heard St. Foix and his comrade talking of the king's new mistress, and a moment later found *who* it was. In that moment, I found that I had loved—what—a woman of the street, driven to vice by want—a woman sinning for love? No—a creature high in every gift of God and man, beautiful, talented, rich, yet—a purchased mistress to a thing without brains or beauty, king though he be, fouled by a hundred low intrigues before, and selling herself to this creature *for a price*! In that moment, Carroll, with a flash like lightning, I saw Therese Le Normand, in my mind's eye, pure as an angel in the midst of a foul family, and I saw that *she had loved me*. And I, fool that I was, had thrown away a diamond, in the darkness of my ignorance, to clutch at a corpse, shining from its own putrefaction. Let it pass, Jack, let it pass. My eyes are open at last. Let them strike me from the list. Let them degrade me and shoot me. I have fallen below disgrace in loving that woman. But, Jack, never breathe a word against Therese Le Normand. She is too good for any of us to speak of. I'll stake my every hope of future salvation on her purity."

He turned away, and sunk in the great arm-chair again, and a deep silence reigned in the room. Carroll was completely sobered and silenced before the greater grief of his friend.

After a little while longer, the cannonade became less frequent, and they could hear the distant rattle and growl of volleys of musketry. Carroll began to fidget about again.

"An attack," he muttered. "Oh, Holy Mother, if we were only there! Where the devil can old Arouet be? He promised to do all he could to get us out for the battle."

Gerald made no answer, and Carroll pursued: "I wonder who the ould chap can be, Gerald? He seems to be mighty powerful about this court, anyway. D'ye mind how grand he spoke to the officer that was taking us to the prison, when he asked him who'd be responsible for our safe-keeping if he turned us over to him? 'I will,' says he, as if he'd been the king himself. 'Is that enough, monsieur? Tell it to Richelieu, to the king himself, if you please.' And St. Foix bows to the ground, and says,

"There is some confusion existing in the contemporary histories as to the exact date of the battle of Fontenoy, arising from the change which occurred about that time, from "old style" to "new style," or from the old Julian calendar (so called from Julius Caesar, it's promulgator) to the Gregorian calendar, as rectified by Pope Gregory. "New style" was adopted finally by most European nations in 1752, but some confusion still exists among the historians of that century as to dates, on account of the change. We have taken the 11th of May, 1745, as the best authenticated date, by "new style," for the battle of Fontenoy. Under old style it was 27th of April,

'If you are responsible, all is well, monsieur,' and the ould chap takes us off without another word."

Gerald rose listlessly, and went to a table, on which lay several books.

"Do you really want to know who he is?" asked the young count, in a tone half absent, half melancholy. "I long suspected it, now I am certain. Look there, and you will not wonder, for we are befriended by the greatest mind in France."

Carroll looked at the book which Gerald had thrown open on the table. It was a copy of Racine's tragedy of "Andromache," and bore on the fly-leaf these words:

"*Francois Marie Arouet DE VOLTAIRE.*"

Carroll started.

"*Voltaire!*"

"The same, monsieur," said the sharp voice of the great author himself, just behind him. "You have been a long time finding it out, but, my faith, I did not lie when I told you it had made Europe ring."

"But you called yourself Arouet," said Carroll, gazing stupidly at the other, who had entered so softly, that they had not heard him.

"Arouet is my patronymic," said Voltaire, smiling; "that is to say, 'twas my father's name, and I took a surname, like the old Romans, which has become somewhat well known. But you seem depressed, gentlemen. What think you? I bring you good news."

Carroll dropped on his knees before Voltaire, and shouted out:

"Oh, Monsieur Voltaire, I always said ye were a blackguard for talking bad of the prastes, but by the holy cross, if ye'll only tell me I can get out of this, I'll swear ye're a gentleman, with the last breath of me body, so I will."

Voltaire laughed heartily at the cuirassier's queer conceit, and spoke with unusual kindness.

"Even the devil, that your priests terrify you with, is not quite as black as they painted him in their illuminations, my friend. You may find Arouet de Voltaire better than some of the priests. I have been to Madame de Pompadour for you—nay, do not start up and frown like that, mad Irelander—I am Voltaire, that did not quail before de Rohan, a prince of the blood. Smooth thy face, or I say no more."

Carroll's frown changed to an expression of puzzled respect, as the frail figure of the poet and philosopher seemed to swell to his own vast dimensions, at the first sign of menace. The big cuirassier bowed low before the demonstration of pure moral and dauntless courage in a feeble invalid and he said:

"Monsieur de Voltaire, I apologize: but I do not like to owe favors to a king's mistress."

"Ah, bah!" said Voltaire contemptuously. "You, with your airs of virtue, are you a pure virgin? Out on your creed, that curses a woman for doing what all men do! Which would you rather, stay here, and be shot in the morning for treason to the king, in drawing on a king's officer, or go out to a field of honor, through the kind intercession of madame le marquise?"

Both Carroll and Gerald were silent, and the latter looked at Voltaire in a sort of bewildered way.

"Madame has her faults," continued the great poet, cynically. "So have we all. What would you? We take the world as we find it. We have a fool—speak low, messieurs—for our king. He needs guiding. The good queen is another fool, and priest-ridden at that. The king hates her. He must have mistresses. He *will* have them. We have given him a woman of wit, mind, and soul, one who loves art and letters, one who loves France, one whose first act has been to raise letters, in my person, to court dignity. Well, this lady, who has sacrificed her good name for France, progress, philosophy, has unfortunately been the means of bringing two gentlemen to harm. Messieurs, she is not a stone, this woman, and if she were, there is an angel near her, whose tears would melt a stone. Finally, the king has found that others value her, and he sets a high price on this new-found treasure. He will grant her any thing. *She has risked all by asking for your pardon*. The king is jealous, but he has granted her this. You are released from arrest. Here are your orders to report to your posts. If you behave well, every thing is possible. After the battle, you will both be tried in the king's chamber, by the king himself. Is that enough?"

He handed them two folded papers. Each opened his own. Gerald's ran:

"Captain Count Desmond is released from arrest for one day, and will report for duty to the Duke of Richelieu, at once. LOUIS R."

Carroll's was as follows:

"Lieutenant John Carroll, of Clare's Horse, is released from arrest for one day, and will report for duty to his colonel, at once. LOUIS R."

Both were signed by the king himself, but the orders were in the handwriting of a lady. Voltaire smiled cynically.

"You soldiers are strange beings. Your eyes glitter with joy, because I have brought you—a chance to get killed. Go, then."

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE FIELD.

THE Duke of Richelieu sat on his horse, almost alone, about a hundred yards from a little hillock, surmounted by a mill, which commanded a view of the whole battle-field of Fontenoy.

Close to the mill, and surrounded by a glittering staff, one might see a fat, dapple-gray horse, with docked tail, on whose back was perched the mean little figure of the king. By his side, on a horse of great weight and bone, towered the colossal form of Saxe, leaning slightly forward on a huge pillow, which was placed on his saddle-bow.

The old marshal's face was contracted with pain, for his position in the saddle was a positive torture to him, and at the moment there was no excitement to make him forget the pain. In fact, there was a lull in the battle.

The king sat on his horse cracking jokes, for the danger seemed over. Thrice the English and Dutch had assaulted Fontenoy and Antoine, thrice had they fallen back in confusion before the murderous fire of a hundred and twenty pieces of cannon, behind heavy earth-works. Now there was a pause in the carnage.

"*Fi donc, monsieur le marechal*," said the king, gayly, "your English, about whom you make such a fuss, are not much of fighters after all. See how quiet they are."

The marshal smiled a painful smile.

"Yes, your majesty. They are preparing an attack elsewhere."

"Let them come," cried Louis, scornfully. "We will cut them to pieces with our Musketeers alone. Why, where is our wit, the brave Richelieu? He shall make us a song about them."

"Richelieu looks grave, your majesty. Perhaps he is afraid," suggested the young duke of Biron, pointing at Richelieu.

"Richelieu is thereby my orders, monsieur le duc," said Saxe, turning his lion-like face on the young fop in calm disdain. "If all you gentlemen of the court had his brains, his majesty would be well served, better than now."

Louis laughed long and loud at the little retort. The king was, for once, in a good humor. He was elated at being in a battle, and finding it pleasant, so far, thanks to Saxe's precautions in keeping him out of the fire. He felt like a hero. There was no danger yet.

"Ah, bah, let us sing," he cried, and forthwith the complaisant courtiers struck up a gay drinking song, somewhat broad in its allusions, which was caught up by the household troops in the rear, who stood by their horses or lounged on the grass, while the clinking of bottles told that they were enjoying themselves. The Musketeers, near by, trolled out the jolly chorus:

"Touketti din-don, ma grosse Marie,
Touketti din-don, ma femme, ma p'tite verre."

While the whole force of the *Maison du Roi* was gayly singing in the lull of the battle, a couple of officers on horseback came galloping up from the bridge of Colonne at the rear.

One of them, a tall, bony man, kept on without stopping to the left, and was seen to reach the Irish brigade, whence a great cheer soon went up.

The other brought his horse on its haunches in front of Richelieu, and silently saluted. It was Gerald Desmond.

Richelieu looked coldly and sternly at him; demanding:

"Who sent you here, monsieur? You were under arrest."

Without replying, Gerald handed him the king's order, which the duke read with apparent wonder. Having finished, he handed it back to Gerald, and stared silently at him.

Presently his face softened a little.

"If it is the king's order it must be obeyed. Who gave it you?"

"Monsieur de Voltaire."

Richelieu elevated his shoulders with an expression of ill-temper.

"He will be meddling, this scribbler, and madame believes in him. Well, I suppose I can make you useful. At all events you may as well be killed as any one else."

"That is certain," said Gerald, frigidly. "Before the day is over you may be glad of the life of even an Irishman between you and death."

Richelieu looked at him with more interest.

"What do you mean?" he said, quickly.

"I mean that the battle is not begun yet," said Gerald. "English troops don't stay still long under repulses. As I left the Chateau Gauram, I could see their lines forming, between Fontenoy and the Wood of Barry."

Richelieu started.

"Do you mean that? How many lines?"

"Three, all red, but there are Highlanders among them."

"One can not see them from here?"

"No, the ravines hide them."

Richelieu looked doubtfully at the young count.

"Do you know you're a fine-looking soldier? It's a pity you and I are enemies, monsieur le comte."

"I see no need for it," said Gerald, boldly. "You gentlemen of the Pompadour clique give yourselves a great deal of trouble about a soldier of fortune, who has nothing left but his honor. Do you seriously think, monsieur le duc, that Gerald Desmond would condescend to use his influence with the mistress, even of a king, to forward his fortunes at your expense? I swear to you, before God and in presence of the enemy, that I would not hurt a man of the whole cabal now, not even Etioles, the crawling worm. Let him fatten on corruption, I'll none of it. I would not stain my sword with his vile blood. I should be compelled to break it."

Richelieu looked at him with wonder and some respect.

"You are a bold man, monsieur le comte, to address me like that."

"I am a desperate man, monsieur le duc, with but one wish left—an honorable death. You have lent the power of the first houses in France to crush me. Show me the way to an honorable grave to-day, and I will say, 'Thanks.'"

"You are young to wish to die. I am fifty, and I find life sweet."

"Should I wish to live," cried Gerald, indignantly, "when you have dishonored my name by false accusations, so that all the glory I may gain on the field will not avail to shield me from court-martial, at which Etioles will bring a dozen perjured men to swear away my reputation? There is but one way to save it, and that way is to die in arms in sight of the army."

Richelieu raised his hat. His selfish, callous heart was touched by the desperation of this young man.

"Monsieur le comte," he said, "I am very sorry we have been enemies. As for Etioles, you mistake. He was some one, yesterday morning. Now, he is nothing. His part is played. Take the word of Armand de Richelieu for this: Do your duty to-day, and you have made a friend of an enemy. After all, France is first."

He was interrupted by the boom of a heavy gun from the redoubt of Fontenoy, almost immediately followed by one from the opposite fort of Barry.

Richelieu broke off, and assumed in a moment the demeanor of an officer on duty, cold and severe.

"Monsieur le comte," he said, "gallop down and see what they are firing at. Then come back and report."

Gerald silently saluted, and then dashed off, full speed. A great load seemed to have been lifted

from his heart by the words of Richelieu. He no longer felt the depressing consciousness that his every step was over pitfalls. Such a sense will render the bravest man either timid or desperate.

Richelieu walked his horse up the hill, and Saxe came to meet him. He heard Biron make some jesting remark to the king, to which his majesty replied:

"I am sure the marshal will do all that is necessary, but I shall stay here."

"Well, duke, what is it?" asked Saxe, gravely. The pain had left his face, to be replaced by an expression of anxiety.

"The crisis is coming," replied Richelieu. "The English are massing their forces to pierce between Fontenoy and the wood. Count Desmond has seen them forming."

"Count Desmond!" ejaculated the marshal.

"Why, he was under arrest. Who has released him?"

"Madame," said Richelieu, quietly. "She has filled in two of the blank orders from the king, in her own hand. Carroll is out, too."

"I am glad of it."

"Humph! So am I, for reasons."

"What reasons?"

"That we shall want every man we have to fill the gap between our redoubts."

"Then you think they are coming, seriously?"

"I know it. They are in three lines."

"Never mind. They will find it hard to pass the batteries."

"Marshal, they will pass them. Listen."

First one gun, then another, thundered from the redoubts, about a mile apart, that covered the gap in the French lines. The two redoubts were wrapped in white smoke, which hung in a dense cloud above them, through which the red flashes incessantly darted, answering from right to left.

Of the enemy nothing was to be seen or heard, as yet.

"Order forward the French Guards," said Saxe, suddenly. "Stop, have you sent an officer to reconnoiter?"

"Count Desmond has gone."

"Good. Send him to me when he comes back."

"I will, if he comes," said the duke, emphatically. Then he bowed, and dashed away.

Gerald Desmond galloped down the slope of the little hill with the windmill, and found himself in low ground. Before him there rose a gentle slope, which shut out any further view till he had mounted it. Spurring his horse—a splendid dapple gray, cross-bred between the heavy Normandy charger and the recently imported Barb—he soon reached the top, and saw before him the whole panorama of the English forces.

A shallow ravine, the remains of an old sunken road, ran down into a plain below, which was covered with troops, against a background of green, dotted with the white tilts of an immense wagon-train.

Across this plain, and within a short distance of the broad ravine, came steadily marching three lines of infantry, in the stiffest order of parade, with sloped arms, in perfect silence. The redoubts on either flank were firing at them without reply, but still they moved on. Even as Gerald looked, several gaps appeared in the front line, as a salvo of cannon-balls swept through them. Ere he had time to notice it, the gaps closed, and the line moved on without a pause.

Bright scarlet coats, with white facings, were in the front line, the second, and part of the third; but on the flanks appeared the dark plaids and waving tartans of the Highland regiments, chief of all, the famous Black-Watch, to receive its baptism of blood that day.

Without beat of drum or sound of trumpet, the English attack pressed silently, grimly forward.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COLUMN OF FONTENOY.

GERALD DESMOND paused but a moment to look at the English line, then dashed forward along the crest of the broad ravine to reconnoiter more closely. The nearer he drew, the more was he struck with the imposing appearance of the English. He noticed, in their front, and already sheltered by the low ridge, six brass field-pieces, bright and burnished, drawn by hand with long ropes, the cannoneers marching grimly alongside with stolid faces, as if they were passing in review.

Looking over the plain, behind the long lines of infantry, he could see the gleaming sabers of a strong force of cavalry, drawn up in equally stiff order, and halted, as if to watch the fight.

He could not help a certain feeling of apprehension as he turned his gaze once more down on the infantry.

Part of the first line had already entered the ravine, and in order to pass, had been compelled to break into a column of the breadth of two full battalions. The plain below was still swept by a fearful fire of round shot from the French redoubts of Fontenoy and Barry, and, in the midst of this fire, the second and third lines called a halt, to allow time for the first line to break.

By this time, the young captain had arrived at the edge of the ravine, so close that he could almost distinguish the features of the enemy below.

Stiff and silent as if on parade stood the long lines of grenadiers, each line four ranks deep. The officers had not even drawn their swords. Instead, they carried canes, and with these they were pointing calmly to their men, as they gave the usual parade orders:

"Eyes right! What are you doing, Private Jones? Dress up, sirrah! Steady! Front!"

"Boom! boom! boom!" went the guns at Fontenoy, firing by battery, and the iron swept like a storm through the scarlet ranks. Not a movement or tremor was seen. Again the stern orders rung out, "Close up! Eyes right!" and silently the men shifted over and closed up the gaps. The dark tartans of the Highland regiments formed a heavy cloud on either flank, and naturally they were most exposed to the fire. Gerald looked at them, and saw behind them a long train of dead bodies on the plain, marking the track they had come. They were standing still, with their muskets at an order, resting on their weapons, and silently waiting, exposed to the storm of death, without a murmur.

The young carabineer gave a shudder as he looked.

"My God!" he muttered, "what will our troops do when they meet those men? Not a regiment in France would stand like that, under such a fire."

The first line had broken, and was now a broad column, solid and massive, filling the hollow way, from side to side. The second line was beginning to follow. The third stood patiently waiting its turn.

Its men had ceased to close up at last.

Like the Highlanders, they stood up doggedly, with ordered arms, and met their death without a murmur. The only moving figures among that scarlet line of grim statues were the mounted officers, who walked their horses up and down in front. Every now and then one was killed, or a horse fell dead under its rider. If the latter was not slain or crippled, he remained in front of his men.

Not a straggler could be seen going to the rear. Where the wounded fell, there they lay. Discipline had turned these men into iron.

Suddenly Gerald started, and looked at his watch. He had forgotten the lapse of time.

He found that he had been watching the English attack for an hour and a quarter. It was almost noon, and the third line was at last breaking into column to enter the ravine.

He turned his horse, and rode along the edge of the ravine. It was packed full of troops from end to end, the tall grenadier caps of the English and the towering black plumes of the Highlanders moving on with the same regular swaying motion. The solid tramp of the marching column echoed from side to side of the hollow way, with a more solemn and imposing sound than if they had been accompanied by all the blare of martial music.

Grim, silent, ominous of vengeance, tramped steadily on the "Column of Fontenoy."

With a sense of overpowering anxiety, Gerald dashed the spurs into his horse and flew to bring the news to Richelieu. When he was within a hundred yards of the head of the column, the fire from the redoubts ceased.

He knew the meaning of that.

The whole of the column was at last in the hollow way, and out of range of the French guns. Vengeance was coming.

Again he lanced the sides of his charger, and tore along. He was at the head of the ravine at last, but not before the enemy. Before he could get there, he saw their field artillery emerge from the mouth of the pass, and go into battery on the crest of the dividing ridge, behind which was the French army.

A moment later, they opened furiously.

Gerald uttered a groan of anxiety. What if he had stayed too long? He feared he had, for he must pass through the English battery to get back to his friends.

Nay, worse than that.

Before he can reach the head of the ravine, one, two, three broad lines of men stolidly tramping along, have emerged on the upland!

He must pass by their flank, within a hundred feet!

Setting his teeth, he spurred his horse for the last time, and shot away ahead. A moment later, he was abreast of the fourth of these solid battalions, and glanced down the rigid and perfectly dressed lines of white cross-belts, on scarlet, below the tall white and gold fronts of the grenadier caps. Four ranks were there, each as straight as a plum-line, with gleaming muskets sloped back, shaven faces looking grimly forward.

Not a man turned his head as the French officer galloped by.

A general officer on a gray horse gave him a careless glance, as he passed, then turned to his men and called out sharply:

"Colonel Campbell, keep your men dressed, sir. You're not in the militia. Close up."

Gerald galloped on past the column, through the battery, and out into the plain, unchallenged. Not a man deigned to notice him.

They were after higher game, in the terrible Column of Fontenoy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE IRISH BRIGADE.

A GROUP of officers was gathered in front of the Irish Brigade, talking to each other in low tones, and gesticulating with the appearance of suppressed excitement. They were the colonels of the different regiments, and conspicuous among them was the gray head and martial figure of Lord Clare, senior colonel and brigade commander. Dillon, who led the first regiment of foot, was talking earnestly to him.

"We ought to be closer up, my lord. It's my belief that the blackguards are behind the hill now. Hark, the firing from the redoubts has stopped. Yes, I told ye so. See the guns going into battery on the crest. The time has come."

"Bang! bang! bang!"

Three clouds of white smoke, three red flashes from the crest of the swell, announce that the enemy have reached the French center, and commenced their attack.

Below them, in the plain between the mill and the ravine, are arranged the camps of French infantry, in a long line.

The King's Own is on the right, Aubeterre next, then Courten, then the four battalions of the French Guards, last the scarlet coats of the faithful Swiss. The Irish are drawn far back, near the wood of Barry, abreast of the mill where the king is stationed.

"There go the Guards at them," cries an officer.

"Now you'll see fun, gentlemen."

Two of the four battalions of French Guards suddenly started forward at quick-step, and swept over the plain, toward the battery which had just opened. As they moved, three more guns went into battery on the left of the English, and began to fire.

A wild cheer broke from the Irish brigade at the sight. Their blood warmed as the battle opened.

Presently, out of the English battery comes a horseman, riding at a desperate gallop. They see him dash past the flank of the Guards, waving his hat, and a second cheer bursts out.

Every one can see that this horseman is a French officer, for he wears the white coat and crimson facings of a carabineer.

"Whoop! hurroo! Gerald Desmond, by the Holy Cross!" yells a voice from Clare's regiment. Then a wilder yell goes up from the impatient brigade, and a riotous movement of men begins. The Irish are afraid the Guards will rob them of the fight,

Lord Clare rides back and holds up his sword, shouting sternly:

"Steady, Irish, steady! You'll have work soon enough! Silence in the ranks!"

Like rebuked school-boys, the soldiers fall back into the ranks, and only a hoarse murmur of impatience gives token of the smothered fury that rages there.

Patience, old brigade, your turn is coming.

Gerald Desmond is seen to dash up the hill and salute the marshal. Then they see that Saxe throws away his pillow from the saddle and gallops off toward Antoine. Now all eyes are turned on the French Guards. Steadily they sweep on, quickening their pace to a run. Up the hill they charge in the face of the artillery, with a loud cheer. A rattling volley, the cannon are silent, the crest is crowned, and over the hill go the Guards, in a line of fire and smoke.

Again the savage murmur breaks out from the Irish brigade. The Guards are out of sight.

Then, hark! What is that?

A sharp sound, like a clap of thunder, so close and loud, so true and regular, it seems impossible that it can be a volley.

But it is a volley.

One, two, three, four claps! Then a silence as of death. A moment later, the hill-top is covered with flying figures, as the French Guards, scattered and running for their lives, come streaming down the hillside, a disorganized mob.

Again the regular red flashes, again the white clouds, and the liberated guns reopen on the fugitives.

Then silence. No more shouting now. The Irish are silent too. They know their time is coming at last.

A moment later, the English guns are limbered up, and come tearing down the hill toward the French lines in the plain. The latter are all in commotion.

The King's Own and Aubeterre are running to the center on the double-quick, to meet the enemy they have not yet seen. The crest of the hill is again bare.

And then, on a sudden, a yell of such deadly ferocity that the blood curdles to hear it, bursts from the Irish brigade; for over the hill, rank on rank, in scarlet, white and gold, comes the column of Fontenoy, moving down to the plain with a solid tramp.

After that one yell, a silence as of the grave, as the men, with pale, set faces, compressed lips, and eyes flashing with fury, grasp their arms and wait for the word to advance. The sight of that lordly column has struck the conviction to every heart that no wild attack will shake it. It must be met with discipline as iron as its own.

Now the King's Own and Aubeterre come sweeping on at a run. Courten, the Swiss, and the remainder of the Guards are before them, burning to avenge the defeat of their comrades. On come both lines. Biron, and the young Count de Chabannes are galloping along in front, frantically urging the men to "keep the ranks dressed."

The imposing order of the English has taught their foes a lesson of discipline.

On go the French, at a run, breaking into cheers.

The Column of Fontenoy moves on at funeral time, silent as death. Something in that solid front checks the French. Their pace slackens without an order, the charge lessons to a trot, the trot to a walk, and at last they come to a dead stop at fifty paces from the English. The officers dashing along the front, sensible of the sudden halt and silence, turn, and find themselves face to face with the English guards and the towering black plumes of the Highlanders.

The French, without a word of command, dress up their ranks, in imitation of their unmovable foes, and the English column halts. Then the two lines stand looking at each other with a fixed stare. One feels as if there were nothing but eyes there.

And then—

A strange thing occurs.

Military life is full of formal courtesy, and its instinct of habit, stronger than nature, breaks out there.

Facing the death that looks from those lines of eyes, the high-bred nobles who are officers can not forget their manners. The full uniforms of both sides increase the illusion. It seems only a gigantic parade.

De Biron and Chabannes on one side, Albemarle and Churchill on the other, mechanically raise their hats and salute each other. In a moment every officer in front has followed the example.

Following that a dead silence, broken by an English colonel,* who rides out, removes his hat, and cries:

"Gentlemen of the French Guards, please to fire."

A French officer, bowing, answers:

"We never fire first. Fire you, gentlemen."

The compliments were over. Death only remained.

Down came the front rank of muskets in that formal column to a level. One, two, three, four! Like single claps of thunder each of the four ranks delivered its fire amid a rattling fusillade from the French; and when the smoke blew aside, the French line had vanished in a mob of dying men and fugitives.

Without shout or cheer, the Column of Fontenoy moved grandly on down the hill, and debouched into the plain, while before it fled in confusion several regiments of the flower of France.

The Irish brigade murmured loudly, and gnashed their teeth with rage, but the Column of Fontenoy moved on.

Gerald was with Richelieu, near the king, who had ceased to jest. The English cannon were firing again, and the balls whistled too near to be pleasant. Gerald saw the sweat rolling down the face of the king. After all, these English were worth more than he had thought. Richelieu begs his majesty to

retire across the bridge; that, his sacred person once assured, he would answer for the battle. The king says obstinately:

"No, I stay here. See, my own regiment is charging them."

In fact, at that moment, the King's Own and Aubeterre charged the left flank of the column, cheering loudly. Silently a single battalion wheeled out from the English, delivered another of those withering volleys, and both regiments were scattered to the winds.

The Column of Fontenoy moved on.

A little more and it would be at the mill, the French army cut in two, the king a captive, if something was not done.

An officer comes galloping from Saxe. The king must retire over the bridge, or the battle is lost.

"No," says Louis, obstinately, "I know he will do all that is proper, but I stay here."

But the Column of Fontenoy moved on.

Richelieu beckons to Gerald, and dashes away to the carabineers, who are drawn up near the Irish. They are detached from the king's household.

"This must be stopped somehow," he mutters.

A few moments later, the solid gray squadrons of the carabineers trot ponderously forward. The earth trembles under their tread, and at the sight of the horsemen the great column halts. Gerald finds himself in front of his own squadron, and sees Etioles in command. He rides up, with pale face and set teeth. Even the battle can not extinguish his disgust and hatred for the man.

"Go," he says, imperiously, pointing to the rear. "This is my squadron."

Etioles, pale and haggard from his recent shock, obeys silently, and the line thunders down.

Silent and motionless stood the Column of Fontenoy, till the horsemen burst on them with a shout.

Then rung out another of those awful volleys, and rider and horse fell in heaps, rolling over and over to the feet of the rigid Englishmen. Gerald found himself almost alone one minute, the next, galloping instinctively back in a knot of fugitives. The charge had failed.

Toward the mill, relentless as fate, the Column of Fontenoy moved on.

Now shouts are heard in front, and the bulky form of Saxe comes galloping back. All pain forgotten, his lion-like face glows with excitement. The battle has cured him. He is bringing back reinforcements from Fontenoy and Antoine. The regiments of Vaisseaux and Hainault are coming, and presently open fire on the column. There is no more shouting and enthusiasm now. The business is too serious.

Vaisseaux and Hainault in turn are swept by those withering volleys, and break and fall back. But they rally a little way off, and retain their ranks.

The English halted at last.

Saxe sat on his horse and watched them, then turned to an officer near him. The column was then within three hundred paces of the wall.

"Order forward the Irish Brigade," said the marshal.

At this moment Richelieu, followed by Desmond, galloped up to the king, who sat, with his face pinched and white, watching the battle. In spite of his obstinacy, he was trembling all over.

"What news, monsieur?" he asked, anxiously, of Gerald, as Richelieu galloped past toward the marshal.

Gerald's eye was sparkling with excitement. He had seen that the English were halted. He had also seen the whole of the Maison du Roi standing idly by their horses, not a hundred yards back, with a strong battery of artillery. And Gerald had a soldier's eye. He forgot that he addressed the king of France. He only saw France in peril, and a chance to save her.

"What news!" he cried. "The battle is ours, sire. Order up those guns that stand idle behind the mill. Charge with the Maison du Roi, surround them with our troops, and the day is ours. Look, sire!"

As he spoke, a tremendous yell attracted their attention to the left of the army, and a magnificent sight burst on them.

The long line of the Irish brigade, in beautiful order, was sweeping down on the right flank of the English column, behind the white and green standards that proclaimed their joint allegiance to France and Ireland. The two wings of Clare's Cuirassiers rode on either flank, and the foot regiments charged in the center.

For the last time pealed the sharp volleys from the Column of Fontenoy, but not with the old crushing effect.

They had met men of sterner stamp at last.

With a wild yell of vengeance that rose high above the roll of musketry, the Irish Brigade charged home—ragged with gaps of dead men, but invincible.

A moment later, the massy column was rent with the cold steel, and Clare's Horse buried their long rapiers at last in Saxon bosoms.

Gerald turned to the king, quivering with excitement.

"In God's name, sire, may I take the guns?"

The king hesitated, trembled like a leaf, nodded. Away went Gerald like the wind, and found Richelieu grinding his teeth and watching the column, which was now wrapped in flame and smoke, telling of a furious contest.

"Well?" he cried, in a tone of fierce inquiry.

"His majesty consents."

Richelieu wheeled round, and sped toward the Maison du Roi, spurring like a madman.

Bang! bang! bang! bang! ! !

Four broad flashes, four clouds of white smoke, and the column of Fontenoy was plowed in twain with a horrible gap, piled with rows of corpses. The reserve battery went into action at pistol-shot distance, and every shot told.

A moment later, down thundered the heavy squadron of the Maison du Roi, on the front of the column. Then came Aubeterre, Courten, Hainault, Normandy, King's own, Penthièvre, the Guards, Carabineers, Musketeers, Swiss Guards and all, beaten troops and fresh, charging together all round on the devoted column of Fontenoy, torn with the artillery, struggling with the Mad Brigade of Irish; and the day was won.

The Irish Brigade had turned the wavering scale, and the column of Fontenoy was annihilated.

Richelieu beckoned to Gerald and rode up to the

king as he sat on his horse, the ground before him covered with captured standards, a sullen crowd of prisoners standing by.

"Sire," said Richelieu, "I have a favor to ask your majesty."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MADAME DE POMPADOUR.

In a magnificent boudoir in the Chateau Gauram, reclining on a sofa of ivory and blue satin, lay Madame de Pompadour, surrounded by every luxury that heart could wish, but wearing an expression of anxious care on her face. The wealth of the king had transformed an old-fashioned turret chamber into a miniature of her boudoir at Paris; her dress was exquisite, her position assured, her beauty in its prime, and yet the Marchioness of Pompadour looked anxious and unhappy.

What was the reason?

The booming reports that momentarily shook the windows of the chateau answered the question.

Fontenoy was still in suspense, and defeat meant the capture of a French king, the fall of Pompadour.

Near the marchioness was Therese Le Normand, seated by a window, her face pressed against the pane, watching in silence. Every now and then she turned away with a weary sigh, and looked at the Pompadour, with a mournful, desolate look. Then you might see that her eyes were dry, her cheeks flushed with a feverish glow.

The next moment she would start and turn, to look out again with the same hungry, desolate look which she had worn for hours.

So the two women waited for news of the battle.

At last the hot cannonade ceased, and silence followed. Therese turned to her sister-in-law, and spoke for the first time.

"They have stopped, Antoinette. Is the battle over?"

Madame had raised herself to listen.

"How can we tell? I wish I were a man. Oh, it is maddening to lie here and listen, and listen, and know that one's fortune depends on others. I wish I were a man."

Therese shuddered.

"And go out there? Oh, heavens, no. I was not thinking of that."

"Of what were you thinking then, mademoiselle?" demanded the marchioness, sharply. She felt incensed against every one, in her gnawing anxiety.

"I was thinking of Gerald Desmond," said Therese, simply and solemnly, "and wishing I were dead if he were killed."

Madame started up and began to pace the floor. As she walked, her face was very pale and set, but she tore her handkerchief apart with a nervous motion. Therese watched her, quietly.

For several minutes neither spoke. At last the marchioness turned on her, excitedly, speaking in a low tone of exasperation, very rapidly.

"What would you have, you, with your airs of virtue? Am I to blame for every fool that falls in love with me? What do you want me to do? Have I not stretched my power to its utmost limit to send him to the field of honor? The king left me without a farewell, simply because he is jealous. What more can I do? Speak, then. Do not sit there, with your solemn eyes looking reproaches you dare not utter! What can I do?"

"Nothing now, God help us both. He may be dead, for all we know."

"And he may not," interrupted madame, impatiently. Her face grew very pale, however.

"Well, well, what would you, if he comes back? Quick, give it a name. I swear to do it, if only to rid myself of your haunting eyes. *Pardieu*, Therese, I shall hate you next."

"I do not wonder," said Therese, her dark eyes filling with tears for the first time. "He is not the only one you have injured."

Madame de Pompadour looked at her with glittering eyes.

"I understand you, mademoiselle. I have injured you, too, I suppose, with the whole house of Le Normand, in the person of your sainted brother. Is that it?"

Therese drooped her head before the thrust. There are moments when modest, shame-faced virtue is abashed by the bold front of shameless vice. And poor Therese felt that she was indeed disgraced in the name she bore.

Suddenly she burst into tears, and fell at madame's feet, sobbing out:

"Oh, Antoinette, do not think me hard like the rest. I know your temptations. Not you have disgraced me, but my own brother, Etioles. But, oh, Antoinette, grant me but one boon, only one! If he comes back—if he comes back—send him away, send me away, send us all away from this wicked place where I live in torture daily. I do not blame you, Antoinette. We are different. The good nuns made me unfit for this court, where every thing is worldly. You are happy here. Do send me away, and him also, or they will make him bad too."

The guilty marchioness looked down at the girl with a strange expression. The anger in her face gave way to a look of deep pain and mortification at the artless words of Therese. Every one was a stab through her brazen mail. She turned away and walked to the window, whence she gazed out over the landscape in silence.

Bitter thoughts crossed her mind. Petted and caressed by the court, the first lady in France; yet here was a little creature that she had tenderly loved in her way, begging to leave her forever, showing in every artless word a repugnance that she could not conquer, and asking her to send away the only man that had ever loved her truly, for fear of contamination. Great and powerful as she was, she felt that two people at least despised her. She had read it in Gerald's eyes before the dais. She read it in the words of Therese, now.

Then, as she gazed from the window, she became sensible of something neither had noticed. Guns had been booming again during her conversation, and she heard a deep, incessant growl in the far distance, rattling louder and louder momentarily.

Presently a long train came streaming down the road, men on foot, men on horses, wagons, all coming rapidly toward the chateau. Far in advance were several hussars, at full speed, straggling one after the other, according to the powers of their horses; and the foremost was close to the moat. He

*Lord Charles Hay, Lieut-colonel of the Foot Guards. Carlisle has labored to throw discredit on this story as to the form of words used, which he insists were merely bantering, on the testimony of a supposed letter from Lord Charles Hay, written after the battle, but his letter is at least of more doubtful authenticity than the famous story, first told by Espagnac, who was present and wrote under supervision of Saxe. Like many truths, it is stranger than fiction, and we insert it without apology.

came thundering over the drawbridge, and a great bustle ensued, as the guards ran out and clustered round him. There was scant discipline in the Chateau Gauram, for the king was away, and the queen was not there.

The hussar seemed to be telling some story of the field, for he gesticulated violently, frequently pointing up the road; and the crowd in front of the drawbridge grew greater, while the anxious watcher heard confused cries from below. Madame de Pompadour turned pale. It does not need a veteran to read the signs of a defeat. The train of fugitives came rolling on past the chateau, the growling rattle of musketry came nearer and louder, and the guns fired furiously.

Madame threw up the window and leaned far out. The sounds came plainly to her ear from below. Suddenly the hussar cried:

"*Sauve qui peut!* The English will be here in an hour."

Then he turned his horse and galloped away on the road to Paris, joining the stream of stragglers.

The marchioness turned, with pale face, to confront Therese, who had come close and heard the last words.

"All is lost!" she whispered, huskily. "We have been defeated!"

To her surprise, Therese thrust her aside, and listened, her face earnest, intent, and hopeful. The young girl clutched the arm of the Pompadour with an unconscious force that buried the soft fingers in the flesh like claws of iron. She looked like one inspired, as she cried out:

"It is false! Hark to the firing! *It comes no nearer.* I have heard that sound before. The day is not lost. He is there. I tell you, Antoinette, we are not defeated yet."

Then the nature of the little one, modest and shrinking in ordinary times, rose to its true sublimity in peril. The blood of the old race, that was degraded in Etioles, reasserted its old heroism in Therese, as she repeated:

"Antoinette, it is but the crisis. Victory hovers aloof, but *she comes!*"

The marchioness had lost all her courage. Trembling and tearful, she sunk at the feet of Therese. They had changed natures.

"Oh, Therese, God grant it!" she moaned. "Only prove your words true, and I swear to do anything you wish. I swear on my salvation."

With gleaming eyes Therese held the crucifix to her lips.

"Swear it again," she said, eagerly.

Madame de Pompadour kissed the crucifix.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TWO HORSEMEN.

THEN the two women staid by the casement, one erect, proud, looking toward the pall of smoke that hung over the distant field of Fontenoy, like a prophetess awaiting inspiration, the other crouched at her feet, clinging trembling to her hand, desolate, despairing.

The din of that distant conflict grew louder and louder, till it seemed as if the air was never to cease quivering, and still Therese stood watching without a tremor.

Suddenly madame felt the hand she held contract like a vice.

The firing grew louder a moment, died away again, and over the air came the distant echo of wild and long-continued cheering, which grew louder and louder, till it overpowered the firing, and the latter died away in a fitful cannonade.

Therese kept her eyes on the road. The stream of stragglers had stopped short. They had heard the cheering.

Madame de Pompadour clung to Therese and looked wonderingly up. The girl's face seemed to shine with inspiration, as she stood with her lips apart, her eyes fixed in a stare of intense, unwinking eagerness on the road.

The marchioness, sensible of the hush and cheering, with a wild hope at her heart, slowly rose up, and staggered to a chair, into which she sunk helplessly.

She was aroused by a sharp cry from Therese.

"*C'est lui! Que te dis-je?*"

(It is he! What said I?)

As she spoke, the distant cheering came nearer and nearer. The long stream of stragglers vanished from the road into the fields on either side, and two black dots could be seen coming rapidly down the road from the Bridge of Calonne.

The black dots changed color as they came nearer. They were horsemen on gray horses, dark with foam. As they came the road was cleared before them as if by magic, while the cheering grew louder and louder.

Now the watcher can see the horses straining on between an avenue of shouting stragglers in the field. The nearer they come, the more rapidly they seem to fly. Now one can hear the clatter of the horse-hoofs and see the uniforms of the riders, the glitter of cuirass and bridle-bit, the white coat with crimson-and-gold facings.

A moment later and the drawbridge is covered with a black sea of heads, and the chateau rings with the cheering, as the two horsemen come shooting over the glacis.

The door opens behind and Voltaire bolts in, waving his hat.

"Rejoice, madame, victory is ours! Richelieu and Count Desmond are coming with the news. They are here."

Madame de Pompadour burst into tears. Therese says never a word, but leans hungrily from the window.

Thunder of hoofs on the drawbridge, a clatter below, as Richelieu and Gerald pull up on the pavement and leap down.

Therese turns to madame with burning eyes, disregarding Voltaire. She sweeps up to her and clutches her wrist.

"We have won," she whispers. "Remember your oath. Send him away."

The marchioness looks at her with a half-frightened air.

"I will, as God hears me. He shall go with Voltaire to Berlin."

Then comes a clatter of spurs on the stairs, a noise in the anteroom, and a servant opens the door with beaming face. "Monseigneur Richelieu, madame,"

"Admit him," says madame, straightening up with an effort.

Then Richelieu and Desmond enter the room.

"Madame la Marquise," says the duke, with a profound bow, "I have the honor to present the compliments of his majesty, and to inform you that the English are beaten and in full retreat, having lost nine thousand men and forty cannon. I have also the honor to present to you my aide-de-camp, Monsieur le Comte D'Esmonde, whom his majesty has promoted on the field for gallant conduct. Mademoiselle Le Normand, will you kindly take charge of the count and carry him to the saloon? Monsieur de Voltaire will stay. I have business with him and madame."

What has come over Therese, the inspired heroine, that she trembles and blushes like a school-girl, as she advances to Gerald's side and timidly whispers:

"Will monsieur be pleased to accompany me?"

And what ails Gerald, the pale, desperate soldier of the morning, only longing for an honorable death? He too is confused as he offers the young lady his hand and conducts her into the saloon, but one thing they all notice. He neither looks at, nor bows to, Madame de Pompadour, the first lady in France.

Richelieu closes the door and comes back, the courtly smile gone from his face. It is serious and dignified.

"Look you, madame," he says, abruptly, "and you, Voltaire, old scribbler of verses, I have changed my mind to-day. You, with all your wit, monsieur, don't know what a soldier is. I tell you, that young man must not be sacrificed. Henceforth I am his friend, for he is brave as a demigod. You think that nothing, perhaps. Had you been with me to-day, you would have changed your mind. Brave men are not picked up on every bush. He must be saved."

"Monsieur, monsieur, who wants to hurt him?" cries Voltaire, in a peevish tone. "*Parbleu*, not I, for I have in him an interest of twelve thousand francs, for which I expect interest."

"Aha, old usurer," said Richelieu, mockingly; "so you have been speculating again. *Parbleu*, you would not have given much for your investment at one time to-day. Well then, we are in accord, but what says madame? Is she willing to help save this foolish youth who stands in the king's light to go away from here? That is his only safety, remember."

"I have considered," said madame, in a low tone. "He has no better friend in you than me, monsieur. Monsieur Voltaire is going to Berlin. The king has granted me so much. The count can go as his secretary of legation."

Voltaire kneels to kiss her hand.

"Grant but one favor more, madame, and I am happy."

"What is that?"

"Twenty thousand francs of income," whispered Voltaire. "In a few years Monsieur le Comte will be able to pay his debts to me."

She smiles coldly.

"What is the amount, up to to-day, interest, usury and all?"

Voltaire whispers a sum nearly double.

"You shall have it to-night," she says, haughtily. "Prepare for your journey, monsieur. The news of Fontenoy will please his majesty of Prussia."

Voltaire backs out, and Richelieu is left alone with madame.

"After all, madame," he says, cynically, "two lovers are a dangerous luxury, if one is a king."

Madame answers bitterly:

"You put me here. Consequently you are the master yet. My turn will come when my power is fixed."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A HASTY WEDDING.

TWO large traveling carriages are waiting before the principal gate of the Chateau Gauram, which is all ablaze with lights, echoing to the strains of bands, the buzz of gay conversation and laughter, for a magnificent ball is given in honor of the victory and all the world is there, or at least the court.

The king has been graciously pleased to appoint Monsieur Voltaire ambassador to Berlin, and his excellency is receiving his credentials before departing. There is a buzz concerning the ambassador and his secretary, a fellow nobody knows, except that the king gave him the cross of St. Louis on the field of Fontenoy.

While the chateau is full of guests and music, the little chapel at one end of the north wing is lighted up, and a priest and acolytes are waiting there with an air of expectation.

The king's apartments open into this chapel, and a group of people are gathered in the king's cabinet.

His majesty himself is there, with a puzzled, weary expression of face. Madame de Pompadour is near him. Voltaire and Richelieu stand before the king, and, a little retired, are Carroll, Cavanagh, and red-faced Sergeant Poirier, the latter with an amputated arm, bound up in white, looking ready to drop.

Richelieu says to Carroll:

"Take the man away. It's lucky Etioles was killed, or this plot would have cost him his life now. Friend, you have saved yours by telling all. Go."

As Poirier is taken out Madame de Pompadour addresses the king:

"I knew your majesty's magnanimous soul would revolt at the foul plot against Count Desmond, whom you have appointed to the post of Secretary of Legation at Berlin. It recompenses me for the danger incurred in requesting your majesty's pardon for him who had unwittingly offended you."

The king grunted, and darted a suspicious glance at madame, as he peevishly said:

"It seems to me you make a great fuss about this Irishman, madame. One would think you are in love with him. Richelieu and you are in plot together, I believe."

"We are," says madame, boldly, "and I will tell your majesty the cause. The count is a person we both esteem, and my sister, Mademoiselle Le Normand, is greatly attached to him. The count is too poor to wed her, and we wish to see them united. That is our reason for urging his appointment."

The king brightens up, and says, briskly:

"Mademoiselle is rich enough for both. Decidedly

it is a good match. Let them be sent for. I wish it."

Looking keenly at madame he continued in a whisper:

"I'll see if your story is true, cherie—I do not trust you yet."

"Mademoiselle, I have only one word to say. Farewell."

"Farewell. Do you depart so soon, then?"

"This very night, for Berlin, by the king's order."

"Then I can but wish you a good journey, count."

She stands in the boudoir of madame, imperial in her dark beauty, for she is attired for the ball. Gerald bows low before her, and then lingers awkwardly. Therese is very pale.

"Mademoiselle," he begins, "I was going without saying—I find that I cannot go without saying—"

Here he breaks down. Therese does not utter a word, but seems very busy examining the lace on her handkerchief.

"I was about to say, mademoiselle," he continues, more coherently, "that I did not know until to-day what I owe to you."

"To me? Nothing!"—trembling excessively.

"Pardon, mademoiselle. Carroll has told me how you exposed your own life at the bursting mill of Doigny to save mine."

"But 'twas you saved me there, Ger—monsieur," she says, lifting her eyes a moment, and dropping them with crimson cheeks. "I'm sure—had it not been for your courage and coolness then—I should have never—never seen the light again."

Gerald is silent awhile, then he speaks with a certain gravity of demeanor that shows he has made up his mind to a solemn duty, and is about to perform it.

"Mademoiselle Therese Le Normand," he says, "I am about to do a thing that will lower me in your esteem, and yet I owe it in honor to you to tell the truth. Mademoiselle, a few months ago I saw and loved one whom—I will not mention again while I have breath. I thought her a pure and perfect being, and I found when too late that I had loved a vile thing. Mademoiselle, I met you only the second time I saw her, and you saved my life by a timely warning. A second time I met you, and again you came to warn me. In my mad passion for a bad woman I slighted the warning, and met—ruin. Mademoiselle, my punishment now is, that, loving you as I do more than my life, recognizing in you the real angel which I fancied in her, I see that I have thrown away the whole happiness of my life, and in slighting you have made you hate me. I know that I deserve it, and I bow to your decision, mademoiselle; when I am far away from you I will pray that you may be happy; I am self-doomed to solitary despair."

He was retiring slowly when she rose up eagerly.

"What do you mean?" she said, in a low tone.

"I hate you! Are you mad or mocking me? Is it that you hesitate to ally a name like yours to the dishonored house of Le Normand that you speak like this to hide your real motive? Oh, monsieur, you might have spared me that blow. I never injured you."

She sunk back weeping on a couch, and somehow in a moment Gerald was beside her. He looked at her shaking form a moment with an appearance of doubt half-frantic, then threw himself at her feet, and cried out:

"Let them call me a fortune-hunter. Let them sneer at me as they like, I will do it. Therese, Therese, I not only love you, I offer you my hand and heart. Reject them if you will. I shall deserve it for daring to aspire to an heiress like you. But you shall not doubt I love and honor you more, in your purity and truth, than if you owned for your house the Bourbon itself."

Therese looked at him between her fingers.

"Do you mean you love me, and offer to wed a girl whose name is tainted with—"

It's not exactly fair to say what Gerald did here. Enough that he met her eyes full and read their secret.

Voltaire opened the door and bustled toward two people, who were sitting at opposite sides of a very large boudoir, as if they were strangers. He looked perplexed as he said:

"I am very sorry, count, and you, mademoiselle, but his majesty is in a very strange humor to-night, and he insists on nothing less than that you two shall be immediately married together, and leave for Berlin to-night."

The old gentleman is somewhat amazed to hear the count answer, coolly:

"Very well, Monsieur Voltaire, I am extremely happy and thankful to his majesty. I am ready."

Voltaire looked from one to the other with a quizzical grin.

"Ohe! Ohe! So it is understood. Well, I can tell you one thing, monsieur, that is majesty does not order this to oblige you, so much as to get rid of both of you."

"I know it. But the result is the same. For me, I never wish to see France again. I take to Berlin all the land has to offer to me when I take Therese."

"And I will follow you to the world's end," says Therese.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LETTER AND ANSWER.

"EMBASSY OF FRANCE,

"BERLIN, PRUSSIA, JULY —, 1745.

"A Madame,

"Madame la Marquise de Pompadour.

"MADAM AND VERY DEAR FRIEND:—According to your desire, I write to you at the earliest possible date, with news of my mission. It has been entirely successful, and his majesty of Prussia has been more than gracious, positively caressing toward me. He is, there is no doubt, a man of the greatest powers of mind, and a magnificent warrior, but as a guest in a drawing-room he has several faults. Particularly, he writes execrable French verses, and plays on a flute in the most lugubrious style, racking to the nerves of even a philosopher. The Prussians are, beyond all things, and instead of all things, good soldiers. Cabbage and beer seem to be their only food, and one must take a large-sized auger and bore a hole in their heads, if he would get them to understand a stroke of wit. The king,

in passing, is more French than Prussian. He even hates his own tongue, and speaks nothing but French. Yesterday we signed the treaty, which I send you herewith, by embassy courier, with dispatches.

"And now for our little Secretary of Legation and his young wife. I must say that Count Desmond is a man of the most varied talents, and I congratulate you on having induced the king to appoint him. Between ourselves, it was just as well. His majesty of France is jealous, and the sight of one who was a rival, even defeated, is not agreeable, near one. It was lucky for us all that Etioles was killed by those obliging English. As for madame la comtesse, it is enough to say that Therese Desmond is more lovely than ever was Therese Le Normand. She seems very happy, and the count is ridiculously in love with her. Only one point do I quarrel with him and her about. *Neither will ever mention your name.* If I speak of it, both maintain an obstinate silence, and I can not induce them to talk of you, either in praise or abuse. I can not think that this is even common gratitude to one whose favor has done so much for them as you have. Still, as a philosopher, I laugh at them both. I suppose it is some notion they have of honor. Deign, madam, to accept the assurance of my unbounded devotion.

"Your very humble servant,
"F. AROUET DE VOLTAIRE."

"VERSAILLES GRAND TRIANON,
AUGUST —, 1745.

"A Monsieur,

"Monsieur de Voltaire,
"Embassador Extraordinary from France to
Prussia, at Berlin.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—Your letter does not surprise, and yet it pains me. Send me no more disagreeable news. I never wish to see the count or Therese again, and yet I love to hear of their happiness. Remember how I cursed that man's life for saving mine, remember that he loved me when Therese loved him, and judge if it is not a foolish thing for you to drag my name before them. If they do owe worldly prosperity to me, is it not a torture to them to be reminded that they owe it to me? I speak plain, my friend. I have sinned with my eyes open. You shut yours, and pretend to be a free-thinker, when you are, after all, but a bigot to your own deism, as superstitious as any priest. I have chosen my lot. Worldly splendor now, and a name of disgrace to posterity when I am gone. Meanwhile, I shall try to please myself by making Gerald and Therese happy. If they do not thank me, I know I do not deserve it. I am but paying them a debt I owe them, which I began to pay when I forced them to marry each other, in spite of his modesty and her scruples. Let them live in Berlin and be happy.

"This will be brought to you by a special messenger of the court, recommended to me by the Duke of Richelieu. He is an Irish gentleman, of that regiment recently disbanded. I wish you to speak for him to his majesty of Prussia, as a fine officer, who is anxious to enter his service. His name is Carroll.

"Send me all the good news of my proteges. Let me know their wants, but never speak of me to them. Receive, monsieur and dear friend, the assurance of my distinguished consideration.

"JEANNE ANTOINETTE DE POMPADOUR,
"Née POISSON."
THE END.

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